

**Date:** 03 March 2024  
**Services:** *Across the Diocese*  
**Series:** Gazing on the Goodness of God  
**Title:** Slow to Anger  
**Passage:** 2 Peter 3:1-9

Welcome to our third session in our Lenten studies, looking at God's self-revelation in Exodus 33 where He says, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, and forgiving our sins."

Aw Tozer says, "What we believe about God is the most important thing about us," and I love that. How we view God, our understanding of God and His character, is the most important thing about us. The way we see His compassion, His kindness, His judgment, His love, His grace—that will shape who we are.

An observation I have is that for many Christians, we tend to bring God down to our level. So, we make God just a bit better than us, and His compassion is as fleeting as ours, or His forgiveness is as reluctant as ours. His love is as fickle as ours. And when we do that; when we have a safe, understandable view of God, then our faith becomes safe, contained, and a bit shallow. The glorious thing about God is that God is nothing like us. God is so much other than us. So, God's forgiveness is nothing like my forgiveness. My forgiveness tends to be a bit reluctant. I can hold on to my hurts and be slow to forgive. But God's forgiveness is free and lavish. He takes our sins and throws them to the bottom of the ocean. Praise God.

His love is nothing like my love. My love tends to be a bit fickle. I love those people who I find easy to love, but the people I find hard to love, I fail to love well. But God's love is completely indiscriminate and unconditional. I praise God.

And His anger is nothing like my anger. My human anger tends to be flying off the handle or holding on to the hurts, or lashing out when I have been wronged. But God's anger in the Bible is described as slow, long-fused, patient. That's our theme for today: The God who is slow to anger.

That phrase comes nine times in the Old Testament. God describes Himself as slow to anger three times in the Psalms, twice in Moses, Nehemiah, Joel, Jonah, and Nahum. "Slow to anger, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger." The word "slow to anger" is actually two Hebrew words, and it literally means "long nostril" or "long of nose."

Now please don't think Pinocchio long nose, which signifies lying and deception. The phrase "long nose" is very descriptive. It's a description of what happens in our faith when we get angry. When we get angry, we tend to flare our nostrils, our lips are pursed, and our nostrils are flared. It's a very descriptive way of showing that God is slow to anger. He takes a long, long, long time for His nostrils to flare.

And don't misunderstand me, God is not indifferent to sin and injustice. Of course, God gets rightly angry. It is right for God to be angry at all the injustice of this world. It's right for God to get angry when He sees children being abused. It's right for God to get angry when He sees the innocent suffering at the hands of terrorists. It's right for God to get angry when He sees all the violence in this world. That's a righteous anger. But it's slow, measured, right, good, and perfect.

Now, God does get angry, but He is slow; He's quick to love, and He's slow to anger, and that's a great combination. Now, when it says God is slow, please don't hear that word to mean He plods. Have you ever got stuck behind a car that's driving 30 km an hour in a 60 km hour zone, and you get frustrated because they are plodding? They're going slow. That's not the word used here. It's talking about not speed but His

patience. He waits a long, long, long time, giving people lots and lots and lots of time to come back to Him as they change their ways.

I love the story of the man who was shopping in the supermarket, and he spotted another man who had his three-year-old son in the trolley, and his three-year-old son was behaving appallingly. He was throwing a temper tantrum. The father, the child's father, was heard to say, "Billy, calm down." In the next aisle, he was heard to say, "Billy, we're almost done, be patient, we'll get there soon." And at the checkout, he was heard to say, "Billy, we're almost there, we'll be at the car, we'll be home soon." The man in the supermarket went up and said to the father, "I was so impressed by the way that you handled your son who was having a temper tantrum. I was so impressed with how you handled little Billy." And the father said, "Oh, you don't understand. I'm little Billy, and I was talking to myself, saying, 'Come on, be patient, be slow to anger,' because friends, we are like little children having those temper tantrums, and God is like the father who is talking to Himself, saying, 'Be patient, slow to anger, and quick to forgive.'"

Now, sometimes we want a parent to get angry at their children, to say, "Why are you doing this?" And sometimes we read the Bible, and we get frustrated with God who doesn't seem to do what we want Him to do, and we say, "How long, O Lord? How long before you judge these wicked people?" But the truth about God is that He is much more patient with His people than you and I ever would be. So, I've got two truths today:

1. God's patience in our salvation and
2. God's patience in our sanctification.

### **1. God's patience in our salvation**

God wants repentance, not rebellion. That's the purpose of His patience. He wants us to come back to Him. That's why He's slow to anger. 2 Peter chapter 3, verse 9 talks about the return of Jesus, and the people are scoffing because Jesus hasn't returned yet. It says this in 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance." That's the heart of God. He longs for people to be saved. He doesn't desire the death of a sinner. His heart is for every man, woman, boy, and girl to come to faith in Jesus Christ. That's why Jesus Christ hasn't yet come back. Why hasn't He returned? Because 2,000 years later, there are still more and more people who need to turn back to God. That's the patient heart of God.

And I'm so thankful that Jesus Christ did not return in 1989 because in 1989, I was a long way from God. I was living my life my way, and I didn't even think about God. If Jesus Christ had come back in 1989, I would have perished because I was not in a right relationship with my God through Jesus Christ. So, I'm deeply thankful for God's patience in delaying the return of Christ because God does not punish people quickly. It's not one chance to hear the gospel, and then you're struck off His list. God gives people endless opportunities to hear about Jesus and to turn back to Him, time and time and time again. That's why Jesus came, not just to condemn us and not just to comfort us, but to call us to turn back to Him, to seek the Lord while He may be found.

The picture throughout the Bible is of God being slow to anger. In Genesis chapter six, there was so much wickedness, so much evil in the world, but the Lord waited 120 years before judging that evil generation with the flood. In Genesis 15, the Lord waited 400 years before judging the wicked Canaanites. In the book of Exodus, remember Pharaoh, who oppressed God's people and would not let them go. God sent one plague after another, after another, after another, after another; nine different plagues, and then the 10th plague. He was so patient, giving Pharaoh a chance to relent and turn back to God. In Exodus 15:7, it says, "In the greatness of your majesty, you threw down those who opposed you. You unleashed your burning anger; it consumed like stubble by the blast of your nostrils." We read that verse, and we think, "Oh, gosh, God is so

angry." But He had waited and waited and waited and given Pharaoh every opportunity to turn back to Him. That's the purpose of God's patience.

Remember that reading from Joel 2. God's people had abandoned God and were worshiping idols, and it says, "Even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, weeping, and mourning." That's the heart of God, like a father who is waiting, pleading, looking, and longing for us to turn back to Him. And that's true of us. Please don't write people off. There may be people in your life who you think are too far from God. No one's too far from God. There may be people in your life who have heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ many, many, many times but don't seem to believe, and you've kind of written them off. Just trust that in God's timing and in God's ways, He will call His people to Himself because that's the heart of God, and He's patient with people, giving them endless opportunities to hear the Gospel and to believe.

## **2. God's patience in our sanctification.**

God is patient with us as we learn to live more and more like Christ. There are really three types of parents: the parents who kind of let the kids do whatever they want and never challenge or discipline them, and at the other end of the spectrum, the parents who are like dictators, who come down harsh at every first opportunity. In the middle are the parents who are good at disciplining their children in a gentle way. They calmly correct and are consistent in their loving devotion. That is the patience of God because we are like those wax models I talked about last time. None of us are perfect yet, and there's an amazing work of the spirit to be done in each one of us to transform us into the likeness of Christ. We often don't change; we don't become more godly at the pace that we want or that other people want. It's often slow and drawn out, and that is the patience of God.

Do you ever read the Bible and think, "Why were those people so stupid?" Remember God's people in slavery; they'd seen God redeem them, bring them to Himself, divide the waters, and give the Ten Commandments on that mountain. Yet, at the first moment of freedom, they're building a golden calf. They're quick to forget. That is us. God gives us all these opportunities, prods us, prompts us, and we hear a sermon and think, "That needs to change." But often it's in one ear and out the other, and we don't change at the pace and the rate that we should. But God is patient with us. Yes, He disciplines us; He gently corrects us, but that's the heart of a Father who just wants us to become more and more like His Son.

You read about the disciples, the people who lived with Jesus, saw His miracles, and said, "If everyone else deserts you, I never will." But they're so fickle, and we read in the gospels and think, "How could they do that?" Because they were human, just like you and me, saved people of God who have experienced the patience of God. We are quick to forget. I often wonder how long it was before the prodigal son, who was welcomed back by his father, was back to his disobedience.

We are like little dogs. Have you ever seen a dog being taken for a walk by its owner? It often feels like the dog is taking its owner for a walk because the dog is sniffing around all the muck and junk of this world, just dragging its poor owner left and right and centre. That's like us. The first whiff or sniff of something we'd like to do, something we know is wrong, and we're in there. But God is in the business of transforming us, and His usual way is not immediate transformation; we can do that. His most often way is that gradual, slow change.

You open the scriptures, and the Spirit illuminates something or prods you, and you think, "That needs to change." It's one step forward or two steps forward and one step back. I'm very thankful that the Lord has gently and patiently stuck with me for 33 years, and there has been amazing, incredible transformation in my life, but it's been slow and gradual. That is the patience of my Heavenly Father with me. I'm thankful for all those people who stuck by me and gently corrected me. That is the patience of God.

As James 1 says, "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires." So, part of our sanctification, part of us becoming more like Christ, is that we are slow to get angry ourselves. God's long fuse, God's slowness to anger, should be shown in us. We should be slow to react when people wrong us, and we should be quick to forgive others because that is the heart of God.

God is slow to anger, and I'll finish with this: Please remember that God's patience will not last forever. What does the Bible say? "Seek the Lord while He may be found." We've had incredible freedoms here in Australia to preach Jesus, but that might not last forever. More than that, there's going to be a day when Jesus Christ does return, and we don't know when that day is going to be. There's going to be a day when God unleashes His righteous anger once and for all when Jesus Christ returns. So, His patience will not last forever. "Seek the Lord while He may be found." My encouragement to you is to make sure that we have turned to the Lord and for your family and your friends who don't yet know Jesus, that we have the opportunity to speak of Christ and shine Christ into their lives so that they too may know Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour.