



## Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

### Focus Article:

📖 Time for Patience  
(*Attentive Patience*,  
pp. 19-27)

### Suggested Article:

📖 Christ's Patience in the  
Garden  
(*Attentive Patience*,  
pp. 48-51)

### What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to [Christian\\_Reflection@baylor.edu](mailto:Christian_Reflection@baylor.edu).

### Christian Reflection

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# Time for Patience

Christian patience keeps us on the path towards an ever more perfect love, especially when obstacles threaten to knock us off this path, or anger and distractions make us forget where we are going. Here patience gets a quite specific protective charge: it protects us against sorrow.

### Prayer

Almighty God, we forget that waiting is a season that shapes us.  
You, who came in the fullness of time,  
who knows the timelessness beyond time, wait,  
and we, in the image of God, must wait, too.

As we seek your kingdom  
within our homes, with one another,  
in the marketplace, the neighborhood, and the world,  
may we learn how to wait,  
how to be patient with stillness,  
how to keep your eternity just under the surface,  
knowing you wait *for* us and *with* us.  
Amen.

### Scripture Reading: Luke 22:39-45

### Reflection

Early Christian theologians highly valued the virtue of patience, which Gregory the Great calls "the root and safeguard of all the virtues." Growing in the virtues requires much time and attention, so patience is their *root*; and because anger, disappointment, and sorrow may weaken our embrace of God and neighbor, patience is the other virtues' *safeguard*. As Charles Pinches notes, "while patience does not of itself point us to our destination in God, unless we learn it, this destination can never be reached."

Pinches focuses on how patience can protect us from the distraction and disorientation caused by sorrow. We are properly sorrowful, and sometimes deeply so, when we encounter the sinful brokenness in ourselves and the world around us. Yet we know the dangers of such sorrow: we may become so absorbed in our sadness that we cannot see the good, or we may despair of ever doing the good. Thus, Augustine rightly warns that sorrow can produce an "unequal mind" that will "abandon the goods whereby [we] may advance to better things."

How can we feel sorrow (as we should) without succumbing to spiritual myopia and apathy? That is where Christian patience comes in. (It makes sense to call it "Christian" for two reasons: this patience is protecting not just any project we happen to have, but our following Christ; and it is bolstered by hope and trust in God. We will attend to the first point here, and return to the second point in the next study.)

Pinches points to Jesus' patience in Gethsemane as a model for us. "In the scene sorrow comes to Jesus, deep sorrow. This reminds us that the problem is not the sorrow itself, nor its depth," he explains. Jesus' patience is not passive, but active. "Jesus bears his sorrow, not only by praying fervently and weeping before God, but also by keeping his eyes fixed on the work that lies before him, and, at the right time,



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proceeding on to do it." Patience protects him from an "unequal mind." This is most clear in Mark's account, where Jesus commands the drowsy disciples, "The hour has come; ... Get up, let us be going!" (14:41b, 42a). "As for the disciples, the text does not mention that they are sorrowful in this scene – perhaps they are avoiding it as we often do – but their inordinate sleep, their failure to watch and pray, indicate that they have been knocked off course, and have acquiesced to the dark fog that surrounds them."

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus illustrates the divine patience that we see through the long biblical narrative. Karl Barth expands this point: "The fact that [God] has time for us is what characterizes his whole activity toward us as an exercise in patience. Included in this exercise of patience is both God's mercy and punishment, God's salvation and destruction, God's healing and smiting... By it all Israel is instructed in the divine Word.... God always, and continually, has time for Israel."

Those early theologians understood that we need Christ-like patience that not only endures suffering, but clears our eyes to see deeply into reality. Such patience, Pinches concludes, guards us from being overwhelmed by our sorrow and enables us to notice others'. It protects love so it can grow and wait and act.

### Study Questions

1. Why is patience such an important virtue? How might we distinguish ordinary patience from Christian patience?
2. Discuss how Jesus' patience in the Garden of Gethsemane is active as well as passive. Why is this important?
3. According to Pinches, how does Lloyd LeBlanc show Christ-like patience in Sister Helen Prejean's memoir, *Dead Man Walking*? How does LeBlanc's patience reinforce Sr. Helen's?
4. What qualities of Jesus' patience are highlighted in the paintings by Matthias Stomer and Jacopo Marieschi that Heidi Hornik studies in "Christ's Patience in the Garden"?
5. In the departing hymn, "O Master, Let Me Walk with You," what elements of Christ's character do we pray to share? Why are these important for "walking" with him?

### Departing Hymn: "O Master, Let Me Walk with You" (vv. 1, 3, and 4)

O Master, let me walk with you  
in lowly paths of service true;  
tell me your secret, help me bear  
the strain of toil, the fret of care.

Teach me your patience; share with me  
a closer, dearer company,  
in work that keeps faith sweet and strong,  
in trust that triumphs over wrong.

In hope that sends a shining ray  
far down the future's broadening way,  
in peace that only you can give,  
with you, O Master, let me live.

*Washington Gladden* (1879), alt.

*Suggested Tunes: MARYTON or QUEBEC*

# Time for Patience

## Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

## Teaching Goals

1. To consider why the virtue of patience is so highly valued in Christian discipleship.
2. To study Jesus' patience in the Garden of Gethsemane as a model for our patience.
3. To examine examples of the portrayal of Christian patience in art, hymnody, and contemporary narrative.

## Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 4-5 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Attentive Patience (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn "O Master, Let Me Walk with You" locate one of the familiar tunes MARYTON or QUEBEC in your church's hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ ([www.hymntime.com/tch/](http://www.hymntime.com/tch/)) or Hymnary.org ([www.hymnary.org](http://www.hymnary.org)).

## Begin with an Observation

We notice the value of patience when we think about those times we are tempted especially to become impatient. Charles Pinches writes, "Are you driving a car somewhere, perhaps late for an appointment? Trying to arrange a flight in the airport after your scheduled one has been cancelled? Moving through city streets with a group and someone is lagging?"

"Impatience very often arises when we have a plan, and are focused on carrying it through – something we are accustomed to doing in Western society where plans are expected and there is no shortage of instruments for effectively carrying them out. Yet this very fact about impatience can make it ironic, even comical. For impatience tricks us into taking unnecessary risks which can set us far behind wherever we were when we became impatient. Or it causes us to rant and rail furiously against whatever blocks our way. And so it derails us from the very track we wanted so impatiently to travel. Have you ever stood in an airport behind someone who is shouting at an attendant because his travel plans have been disrupted? He looks positively silly. Moreover, you know it will do him no good to vent at this airline representative, who appears to be listening serenely but quite possibly is becoming impatient herself. The traveler's fit of impatience is making it increasingly less likely that he will get where he wants to go." (*Attentive Patience*, p. 19)

Pinches calls this phenomenon the stupidity of impatience. It deflects us, as medieval thinkers would say, from "the good of reason." In this lesson Pinches focuses on how valuable patience is our discipleship as a way of staying the course, thinking straight, and not despairing when we face the brokenness in ourselves and the world.

## Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by inviting members to read aloud together the prayer in the study guide.

## Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Luke 22:39-45 from a modern translation.

## Reflection

This study and the next, “Practicing Hope through Patience,” focus in turn on two reasons that a form of patience might be called “Christian”: it is ordered toward following Christ, and it depends on hope and trust in God. These features distinguish Christian patience from ordinary patience and teeth-gritting endurance. Christian patience is essential in our discipleship because it helps preserve our discernment about and commitment to God’s way when we encounter evil in ourselves and the world. Such patience is modeled by Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

## Study Questions

1. Some capacity for *endurance*, of course, is useful to anyone who is trying to accomplish an important project, whether saintly or wicked. It helps one deal with various difficulties.  
*Ordinary patience*, as Charles Pinches defines it, adds an orientation toward what seems, all things considered, to be good. It helps one stay focused on the track that seems reasonable and not be distracted from the good by things like anger, boredom, or disappointment. It “involves waiting and knowing the right time” to act to achieve or protect the good end.  
He suggests that *Christian patience* “is distinguished by the end to which it is ordered,” namely “following Christ.” Later he adds that it “connects essentially to the theological virtue of hope which sustains life now while also anticipating another time” when God overcomes evil and restores his creation to its good order.
2. As he prays in the Garden, “Jesus, the ‘man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief’ (Isaiah 53:3, KJV), knows the world’s deepest sorrows and enters into them out of love,” Pinches writes. Yet “Jesus bears his sorrow, not only by praying fervently and weeping before God, but also by keeping his eyes fixed on the work that lies before him, and, at the right time, proceeding on to do it.” So, patience involves both passive waiting, but also active focus. “Like Jesus in the garden, the patient person acts often and decisively, although she also waits. She is whole in both her acting and waiting,” Pinches explains. “Such an integral life knows sorrow; it must, if it is truthful. But it also knows great joy. . . . Patience keeps us squarely in *this* time by resisting the forces by which sorrow obscures and overwhelms joy and stymies love. If we are patient we have the power to go forth even if our heart aches, as Jesus went forth in the garden to face his betrayer.”
3. Prejean calls Lloyd LeBlanc the hero of *Dead Man Walking*, the memoir of her ministry to and advocacy for men and women sentenced to death row. He’s the father of the young man brutally murdered by Patrick and Eddie Sonnier. Prejean learns “from Lloyd of a patience that goes deep enough to enable him to emerge whole from the horror of such senseless violence and death.” Lloyd prays regularly for his son’s soul, his wife’s recovery, and for Pat and Eddie Sonnier and their mother, Gladys. He supports Prejean’s ministry to Eddie and visits Gladys before her death to comfort her. Lloyd remains patiently focused on God’s good purposes, and this keeps him from being overwhelmed by sorrow.
4. Heidi Hornik writes that these paintings attributed to Matthias Stomer and Jacopo Marieschi highlight two qualities of Jesus’ patience: it “seeks to avoid suffering if possible, but endures it if necessary” and “rests on a sense of Providence, or of divine purpose.” The images depict Jesus’ anguish, but also his focus on God’s purposes, which are symbolized by the cup offered to him by an angel.
5. Washington Gladden’s, “O Master, Let Me Walk with You,” is a prayer that Christ will enable our faithful discipleship by teaching us his virtues. Each stanza focuses on a related virtue: endurance of hardships that one encounter in service to others, patience that trusts in God to triumph over wrong, and hope in God’s future that brings peace to our lives in the present. We see these virtues on display most vividly in Jesus’ prayer in the garden, but they are visible throughout his ministry. Encourage members to share experiences in their discipleship that have required this sort of endurance, patience, and hope.

## Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.