God's patience is long but not endless.

God is not patient forever. His patience is qualified by an “until” like all good patience should be. God is longsuffering, but only for as long as is proper and right. Then God's patience gives way to wrath and vengeance.

"The longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah" (1Pe 3:20). But God's patience did not last forever. The flood came (2Pe 2:5).

God "keeps his lovingkindness for thousands..." God, in his grace, patiently allows opportunity for mercy and forgiveness. "Yet he will not leave the guilty unpunished..." (Exo 34:7).

God would be unjust to leave unpunished those who don't respond to his patience and lovingkindness. Through every generation God holds people accountable in this way (Eze 18:20-24).

Patience therefore does not mean never being angry. It means being "slow to anger" rather than quick tempered (Prv 14:29). This is how God is patient. God is "compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and plentiful in mercy, but he will not always strive with us, nor will he keep his anger forever" (Psa 103:8-9).

God's patience is illustrated in the "dig it and dung it" parable about the fig tree (Lke 13:5-9). It is interesting to compare this with the fruitless figtree that Jesus made to wither (Mtt 21:18-19).

God's patience allows repentance not rebellion.

Patience is not an end in itself. It has a reason. The point of being patient is to "let patience have its perfect work" (Jas 1:4).

The reason God is patient with sinners is that he gives them opportunity to repent. God is not willing to tolerate evil. Nor does he desire to punish evil.

God wants to forgive wrongdoing, and so he works patiently to bring every sinner to repentance. "God is longsuffering toward us, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2Pe 3:9,15).

That's his goal of grace. God gives people time to repent, but not a licence to keep on sinning.

God's statement about Jezebel is instructive. "I gave her time to repent but she does not want to." God makes it clear that he does not want Jezebel and her followers to continue in sin, nor does he want to punish them.

He wants them to repent. However he warns of "great tribulation unless they repent..." (Rev 2:20-23).

Paul sums up God's patience and kindness in allowing us to repent."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?" (Rom 2:4).

God's patience is shown in loving discipline.

Before we finish our lesson about the patience of God, we should add that God's grace and patience has a strong element of discipline. This is likened in the Bible to a loving father who is a strict disciplinarian (Heb 12:5-11).

Without getting sidetracked into a discussion about the discipline of children, we can help ourselves understand the longsuffering and lovingkindness of God by imagining two kinds of fathers. The first lets his children run wild and is willing to grin and bear it. The second controls and corrects his children calmly, constantly, and consistently, with both firmness and loving devotion. Which parent is showing true patience?

The second —and that's the kind of patience our God of grace shows toward us..