

# Lesson 4: Practicing Patience

## MATTHEW PROFILE



**Genre:** Gospel

**Author:** Matthew

**Passage:** Matthew 5:38-42

**Where Is It:** The first book of the New Testament: **Matthew**, Mark, Luke

**Key Characters:** Jesus, his disciples

**Main Plot:** Jesus challenges his disciples to be people of patience and restraint, and to extend mercy and not seek revenge.



## THE WORD

**Matthew 5:38-42**



## ENGAGE THE WORD

**Lesson Overview: Relational Dimension**

If anyone in the world has ever practiced patience and restraint, it's certainly Jesus. How many times could Jesus have put those who mocked and scoffed him in their place by sending one or two lightning bolts down to show them his power? Yet, every time, he practiced patience and self-restraint. Doing so requires great strength!

In today's lesson we are going to look at some of Jesus' words regarding showing patience and restraint toward others. The instruction Jesus gives is often difficult to hear in a culture that loves revenge and settling the score. Jesus teaches a better way. Students will be challenged to think about what it means to practice Christlike patience and restraint in their relationships.

## Biblical Commentary

The Old Testament reference Jesus makes in verse 38 can be found in Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20, and Deuteronomy 19:21. The law spoke against seeking revenge out of anger: it was given in order to provide the nation's judicial system with an appropriate form of punishment. Unfortunately, the Law that was supposed to guide the nation was often turned into a means to justify vindictive behavior.

The Old Testament prophets spoke of a day when there would be a change in the heart of God's people and they would live under a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:26). In this new covenant, the sins of the people would be forgiven, and obedience to God would come from the heart. In Jesus, this new age arrives.

Jesus reveals that striking back when we're wronged and hating those who have wronged us is inconsistent with the beatitudes that precede this text. Jesus models for us a life in which one is meek, merciful, peacemaking, and willing to suffer for righteousness' sake. Jesus goes on to give four different examples to help convey his point to his listeners. Instead of demanding justice for being wronged,



### THE MAIN IDEA

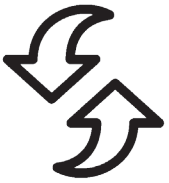
JESUS CALLS HIS DISCIPLES TO PRACTICE PATIENCE AND RESTRAINT AND EXTEND MERCY RATHER THAN DEMANDING JUSTICE WHEN THEY ARE WRONGED.

they are to offer mercy. Jesus challenges his followers to renounce their right to retaliation. Jesus teaches the people to give up the rights they had under the Law in order to show love and grace to those who have wronged them.

Jesus teaches his listeners that it is much more important to give justice and mercy than to receive it. To be a follower of Christ is to show love and patience to those who seek to harm us. Jesus is starting a revolution by calling the rules of this world into question and, yet, at the very same time, redeeming this world that will, in due time, put him to death.

### REFLECT ON THESE THEMES:

Would you describe yourself as a patient person? Do you practice patience with others?



Are you able to practice grace and mercy when you have been wronged?

### REFLECT ON YOUR STUDENTS:

Do your students understand that patience and restraint are qualities that Jesus taught and lived out?

Do your students practice patience and restraint in their relationships?



### Bible Background

A slap on the right cheek is either a blow delivered by a left-handed person or, more likely, a back-handed insult inflicted with the right hand. Such an insult was recognized by Jewish law as an injury for which compensation could be sought before a judge.

### PATIENCE

The capacity to accept or tolerate delay, trouble, or suffering without getting angry or upset.

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

## LESSON OUTLINE



**Main Idea:** Jesus calls his disciples to practice patience and restraint and extend mercy rather than demanding justice when they are wronged.

**Resources:** Bibles, copies of handout, writing utensils

**Connect to My Experience:**

Welcome and Prayer

Revenge Icebreaker

**Connect to the Word:** Read and Reflect on Matthew 5:38-42

**Connect to My Life and the World:** Finish the Story

**Closing:** Affirmation and Prayer



## CONNECT TO MY EXPERIENCE

**Student Goal:** Youth will examine what they think about the topic of practicing patience and seeking revenge.

Welcome your students and allow them to share highlights from their week. Also give them the opportunity to share some praises and prayer requests. Open in prayer.

### REVENGE ICEBREAKER

**SAY:** I want to challenge each of you to think of a time when you saw an individual or a group get revenge on someone else. You may use a real-life example or a story from a movie or book. Break off into groups of three or four and go around and share your example. Talk briefly about whether you think it was good or bad that they got revenge and why you feel this way.

Allow every student in the group to share. Ask for a volunteer from each group to share one of the examples.

**SAY:** As humans, we are prone to hateful anger, to righteous indignation, and to a shameless desire for revenge when we are hurt or offended. In today's passage we are going to look at what Jesus had to say about getting revenge on people who have hurt us and what it looks like to practice patience with other people in our lives. Before we look at today's passage, can anyone think of a time when Jesus practiced patience or refused to get revenge when someone wronged him?

### CREATIVE OPTION: *LES MISERABLES*

Play this clip from Les Misérables: <https://www.wingclips.com/movie-clips/les-miserables-2012/release-him>. This clip is of Jean Valjean stealing the bishop's silver. Instead of punishing Valjean, the bishop gives him the silver. If your students have watched the full movie or read the book, they will know this is a turning point for Valjean. This event changes the trajectory of his life.

Take time to discuss how the bishop extends patience and mercy toward Valjean. Would the story have ended differently if the bishop had sought revenge instead of mercy? How might our relationships be transformed if we were to show such radical patience and mercy toward one another?



## CONNECT TO THE WORD

**Student Goal: Youth will learn that Jesus calls us to live with patience and restraint.**

Ask a volunteer to read Matthew 5:38-42.

You may want to read the passage twice using different translations to help the students hear and become familiar with the passage. You are welcome to have students volunteer to read. Take a few moments to set the context for students before reading the passage.

**SAY:** In this passage, Jesus speaks to his disciples on a mountaintop. He shares about the reality of the upside-down kingdom he calls his disciples to live into. Jesus reminds his disciples that he has not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to fulfill them. He then offers six antitheses saying, “You have heard it was said...but I say to you...”

Distribute this week’s student handout. Ask the students to spend some time reflecting on the lesson. Give them five to ten minutes to fill in their answers.

**ASK:** What lesson do you think Jesus is trying to teach his listeners in this passage?

How can you practice patience in your relationships with others?

What do you think it means to practice restraint?

Do you think getting revenge on someone is a good thing, a bad thing, or somewhere in the middle? Why?

How does Jesus react when people do awful things to him throughout the Gospels?

Spend some time as a large group going over these questions. Ask for volunteers to share their responses to the questions.

### MERCY

Compassion or forgiveness shown toward someone whom it is within one’s power to punish or harm.

### RESTRAINT

A measure or condition that keeps someone or something under control or within limits.



### Facilitator Note:

Let the students know that the only way we can practice Christlike patience and restraint is through prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit. Allow time for them to pray for God’s help individually or in groups.



### Facilitator Note:

Do you relate to this story deeply? Have you had a similar situation happen to you? Push past the responses that are riddled with anger or revenge. Push past the silly responses, too. How can you respond in a way that reveals Christ in you? How can you respond with patience and mercy?

It is also important to remember that some of your students have had deep and serious trauma inflicted on them, in the form of abuse and other evils. While talking about forgiveness, it is important to note that forgiveness and mercy do not always equal staying in relationship with those who have wronged us, and that sometimes the merciful thing is to make sure that person is not able to harm anyone else. Encourage them to talk to trusted adults and counselors to work through their trauma.



## CONNECT TO MY LIFE AND THE WORLD

**Student Goal: Youth will creatively envision how they can respond in difficult situations with patience and restraint.**

### FINISH THE STORY

Divide your group into smaller groups. (Depending on the size of your group, you can also do this activity together or as individuals.) Tell them it is their job to finish the story you are about to tell them. They can finish it any way they like. Read the story out loud a couple times if you think it will help them become more familiar with it. Give them a few minutes to complete the story. Encourage them to think past the silly responses and brainstorm how they can finish the story as they consider the topic at hand.

**Share this story from the writer:** Our gym teacher told us we had time for one more game of dodgeball and that the game would end once a team was eliminated or the bell rang to end class. The whistle blew and the game was on. Dodgeballs started flying in every direction. After a minute or so, I realized I was the only remaining player on my team. As I stared back at the 10 people left on the other team, I knew the situation did not look good. I immediately went into survival mode. If I could survive for 45 more seconds, the bell would ring, and I would make it out safely. A few impressive dodges later, the bell rang, and I raised my hands in victory, even though our team had been demolished. As I turned around, a kid from the other team still had a dodgeball, ran up to me, and threw it at my face from point-blank range. Everyone started laughing at me. As I stood there stunned, I thought about what I should do.

Give them time to consider their responses. Invite each group or a few individuals to share their responses.

**SAY:** Thank you for sharing your various endings of the story with us. We want to continue to practice patience and restraint as Jesus has modeled for us.

### CREATIVE OPTION: ACT IT OUT

Invite students to create a skit. Divide them into smaller groups of two to three people and challenge them to come up with a short skit that demonstrates patience and restraint. Give them several minutes to come up with their skit and then allow them to perform the skit with the rest of the group.



## CLOSING

Reaffirm the following truths to your students:

1. Jesus taught his listeners to practice patience and restraint with people.
2. The only way we can practice Christlike patience and restraint with others is through prayer and God's strength in our lives.

### CREATIVE OPTION

Consider incorporating the following questions into your closing.

What should the Christian's response be to those who hurt them?

How would you define the concept of "going the extra mile"?

Is there ever a point where we have to say enough is enough? If so, how do we know when that time comes?

Consider closing with this prayer, adapted from *The Message* version of Matthew 5:38-42:

Dear God,

We have heard it said, "Eye for an eye, tooth for tooth." But you call us to not hit back at all.

Jesus, you have told us that if someone strikes us, we should just stand and take it. If someone drags us into court and sues for the shirt off our backs, you call us to gift wrap our best coat and give it as a present.

You call us to practice the servant life as you lived. You call us to become people full of patience, love, and mercy.

You call us to live generously. It is by this that non-believers will know we are your disciples. Help us to live by your example even when the world gives us permission to retaliate.

Send your Holy Spirit to empower us to be people of patience and to extend love and mercy.

Amen.