Slow Ground — Children, Fields, and Letting Go

Leader copy · Women's Jail Ministry · a 15-minute lesson · Pleasant Springs Church

Taught by Jamie Gunn · **Read this lesson online:** https://ps-church.com/discipleship/jail-ministry/slow-ground

Before you start — notes for the teacher *(not read aloud)*

Timing. About **15 minutes** at a slow, steady pace. The bracketed times are cumulative. The **designated cut is "Jamie's story"** at [10:30]. It is marked in the script and saves about a minute and a half. If you are *very* short, also shorten "The ancient world" to its first paragraph. **Never cut "Be still," "Who learned patience with you," or the prayer.** They are the point of the lesson.

The one sentence the whole lesson proves. *A child and a field are both slow ground. Neither one can be rushed, and neither one obeys you. That is how God teaches patience, and "Be still" means open your hand, because you are not in control.* If you lose your place, say that sentence and move to the next heading.

How this lesson is built — author and audience, then and now. Every main section does two things. First it asks **who wrote this, and who first heard it** (the ancient world). Then it lays that over **the world these women live in now** (today's world, and the jail). The disciple copy has a two-column "Then / Now" table that follows along. Point to it as you go.

Who is in the room. Women. Some have children, and right now **someone else is raising them.** For some of them that is the rawest wound they carry. Some have lost a child. Some never had children and never will. Some were raised by nobody in particular. **Do not assume any of it.**

What not to say. - **Never ask who has children,** and do not bring up custody, DCS, visits, or who is keeping the kids. The lesson is about being *raised*. Every woman in the room was once a child. Keep it that wide. - **Do not say "you should have been more patient with your kids."** Nobody needs that tonight. The turn in this lesson is the other way: *who was patient with YOU* and *God is patient with you.* - **Never mention anyone's charges, case, or court date** — not even as a light example. - **Patience never means staying where you are being hurt.** If anyone hears "be patient" as "go back and take it," stop and say this sentence word for word: *"Being patient with someone never means going back to be hurt. God's patience never asked anyone to stay in harm's way."* - **Jamie: your own family.** If you share about Colton, say only what you have already said in public — that he is in prison and you are outside that door. **Never say what he did.** The hospital and the church that gave the gas money stay unnamed, as in the Youth Town talk. - **No Greek or Hebrew on the board or in your mouth.** The language work behind this lesson is real. It is said here in plain English.

Words to define the first time you use them (the script does this): *toil* — hard, long work that wears you down and cannot be hurried; *rear* — to raise a child from small to grown; *patience* — being able to wait a long time without giving up or blowing up; *Selah* — a word in the Psalms that most likely means "pause here."

Genesis 3:16 is bigger than labor pain — and good scholars say so. English Bibles say "pain in childbearing," and most people hear one hard day in a delivery room. The words underneath say more: - The word translated **"childbearing" really means *pregnancy or conception*.** It is **not** the word for labor or giving birth. The Bible uses it only three times, never for labor: Genesis 3:16, Ruth 4:13 ("the LORD gave her conception"), and Hosea 9:11. - The word translated **"pain" is the same word as the man's *toil*** in the next verse (see below).

So the verse reads something like *"I will greatly multiply your toil and your pregnancies."* That is the whole long work of bringing children into the world **and raising them,** side by side with the man's toil, which lasts *"all the days of your life"* (3:17). **Carol Meyers,** an Old Testament scholar at Duke (*Rediscovering Eve*, 2013), reads it this way: the long, hard work of a farm household together with the work of motherhood. *The Torah: A Women's Commentary* translates it **"your toil and your pregnancies." Tim Mackie** points to the same "not the word for labor" fact in BibleProject's free class *Adam to Noah* (on the BibleProject app). Not everyone agrees. Some still read the verse as mainly about labor pain, and that is fine. **But teaching it as the toil of rearing children is solid ground.** You don't need to name the scholars aloud; they are here in case someone asks.

The language work, in plain English (say these; they are checked): - **One word, two curses.** In Genesis 3, the word for the woman's *pain* in having children (3:16) and the man's *pain* in working the ground (3:17) is **the same word.** The whole Bible uses that word only **three times** — Genesis 3:16, 3:17, and 5:29, where Noah's father longs for relief from "the painful toil of our hands." All three are in the first five chapters. *(Job 10:8 looks similar, but it is a different word — "your hands fashioned me.")* - **The old Greek Bible saw it too.** The Greek translation made before Jesus' time gives the woman and the man **the very same two words — "in toil."** She will bear children *in toil.* He will eat *in toil.* - **"Childbearing" means "pregnancies."** The second word in Genesis 3:16 is the word for being with child, not for labor — used only three times in the Bible (Genesis 3:16, Ruth 4:13, Hosea 9:11). - **Psalm 127 uses the same family of words.** "The bread of *anxious toil*" (Psalm 127:2) comes from the same root as the Genesis toil — and the very next verse is *"children are a heritage from the LORD."* Proverbs 14:23 uses the second "pain" word of Genesis 3:16 too: *"In all toil there is profit."* - **"Be still" means "let go."** The word underneath Psalm 46:10 means *let go, drop it, open your hand.* And the old Greek translation says

something like **"Stop your work. Take a rest."** It is the opposite of toil. - **One word for patience.** The farmer who is "patient" in James 5:7, the love that "is patient" in 1 Corinthians 13:4, and the Lord who "is patient toward you" in 2 Peter 3:9 — **it is the same word all three times.** James uses it **four times in four verses** (James 5:7–10). - **"By itself."** In Mark 4:28, "the earth produces *by itself*" — the word Mark uses is the one we get our word **"automatic"** from. The farmer does not make the grain grow.

If someone asks (do not teach unless asked): - Who wrote Psalm 46? The title says "of the Sons of Korah" — a family of singers who served at God's house in Jerusalem. Many think it was written when an army surrounded Jerusalem (2 Kings 18–19). We do not know that for sure. *(Some older Bibles number it Psalm 45. Same psalm.)* - **Is the pain in childbirth a punishment on women?** Genesis 3 tells what sin broke — the body, the ground, the marriage. It is a sad report of a broken world, not God saying He likes it that way. The same chapter promises a child who will crush the serpent (3:15).

Scripture. English, ESV — every quotation checked against Crossway's own text.

THE SCRIPT

[0:00] Open — hold out your hands

[Hold up both hands, tight fists.] Make a fist with me. Both hands. Squeeze.

Now think of something you are holding onto like that right now. You don't have to say it. A court date. A person on the outside. Your kids, or somebody's kids. Something you can't fix from in here.

[Hold the fists a moment.] Keep squeezing. That's what most of us do with the things we can't control. We hold on harder.

Here's where we're going tonight: **a child and a field are both slow ground. You cannot rush either one. That is how God teaches patience. And**

the very best lesson you can learn is this — you are not in control, and God is. *[Open your hands.]* You can let go now.

[1:30] Who wrote it, and who heard it first

My name is Jamie. Tonight we're going to read the Bible the way it was first heard. We'll ask two questions every time. **Who wrote this, and who heard it first? And what does that look like in our world now?**

Genesis was written down for **Israel** — a people who had been slaves in Egypt. When they first heard it, they were in the wilderness, headed for a land where they would **farm** and **raise families.** No stores. No pharmacy. If the crop failed, you went hungry. If a fever came, you prayed. **Two things filled every day of their lives: the children and the field.** And neither one could be rushed.

[Point to the Then / Now table on the handout.] Keep that in mind. Now listen to what God said to the first man and the first woman after they sinned.

[3:00] One word for the mother and the farmer

To the woman, God said:

> **Genesis 3:16** — "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children."

And to the man:

> **Genesis 3:17** — "cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;"

Here's something you can't see in English. **That word "pain" is the same word both times.** The mother's pain and the farmer's pain — one word. And the whole Bible uses that word only **three times**, all right here at the start of Genesis. The third time is when Noah is born, and his father says:

> **Genesis 5:29** — "Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands."

Painful toil. That's the word. **Toil** means hard, long work that wears you down and can't be hurried. The old Greek Bible saw the same thing. It says the woman will bear children *"in toil,"* and the man will eat *"in toil."* Same two words.

And one more thing. Our Bibles say *"childbearing,"* but the word underneath means **being pregnant — carrying a child.** It isn't the word for labor. So God isn't talking about one hard day in a delivery room. He's talking about the whole long work of bringing children into the world and **rearing** them — raising them from small to grown.

So God is putting **raising a child** and **working the ground** side by side. Same toil. And it lasts, like the farmer's, *"all the days of your life."*

[5:00] The ancient world — you plant, and then you wait

Think about a farmer back then. You break the hard ground. You pull the thorns. You plant. **And then you wait.** You cannot make it rain. You cannot make a seed come up faster by yelling at it. Moses told Israel that their new land would be different from Egypt:

> **Deuteronomy 11:11–12** — "a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water by the rain from heaven, a land that the LORD your God cares for."

In Egypt, you watered your garden yourself, from the river. In the new land, **you waited on rain from heaven.** God moved them on purpose to a place where they would *have* to trust Him.

Raising a child is the same kind of ground. You plant. You water. And then you wait — years. A child grows **at its own speed.** You can't hurry a baby into walking or a teenager into wisdom. *[Smile.]* Trust me on that one.

Jesus said it like this:

> **Mark 4:27–28** — "He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself,"

He knows not how. The farmer does his part — and then the ground does what only God can make it do. The word for "by itself" is the one we get **"automatic"** from. It isn't up to you.

[6:30] Now — our world, and this room

Now lay that over our world. *[Point to the "Now" column.]*

We live in the fastest world there has ever been. Food in a minute in the microwave. Answers in a second on a phone. Something ordered today shows up at the door tomorrow. **We are trained to think waiting is a problem — something has gone wrong.**

And then you come in here. And in here, *[slow down]* **somebody else decides almost everything.** When you eat. When you sleep. When the lights go off. When you see a judge. When you get a call. You are back on slow ground — the same ground Eve and Adam were sent out to. You can't make the rain come.

Here is the good news hiding in that. **Slow ground is where God grows patience.** It doesn't grow anywhere else. Listen to James:

> **James 5:7–8** — "See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, be patient. Establish your hearts,"

Patience means being able to wait a long time without giving up or blowing up. And James learned it from a farmer. The farmer doesn't sit back and do nothing — he works. **But he knows what is his job and what is God's job.**

[8:30] Be still — open your hand

Now the verse for tonight. Psalm 46. It was written by a family of singers called the Sons of Korah, who sang at God's house in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was a city with **walls** around it. And when this was sung, there was trouble outside those walls — the kind you can't stop:

> **Psalm 46:1–2** — "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth give way,"

People inside walls. Trouble outside that they couldn't control. *[Pause.]* Sound like anyone you know?

And in the middle of all that, God speaks:

> **Psalm 46:10** — "Be still, and know that I am God."

For most of my life I thought "Be still" meant *calm down, hush*. **It doesn't.** The word underneath "Be still" means **let go. Drop it. Open your hand.** *[Open your hands.]* And the old Greek Bible put it like this: **stop your work — take a rest.** That's the opposite of toil. God is saying: *put the hoe down. I am the one who sends the rain.*

Solomon put toil, children, and rest in one breath. Psalm 127 starts, *"Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain."* Then:

> **Psalm 127:2–3** — "It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep. Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD,"

Anxious toil — that comes from the same family of words as the toil in Genesis. And look what comes right after it: **children.** And look what God gives instead of worry: **sleep.** You can't stay up late enough to raise a child or grow a field by yourself. God is awake so you can rest.

You are not in control. And that is the best lesson you will ever learn — because the One who *is* in control is good.

[10:30] Jamie's story — Be still, three times

[CUT HERE if short on time — skip to "Who learned patience with you."]

[Jamie: tell it in your own words. The outline, as you told it at Youth Town:] - My grandbaby, **Atley Grace,** came at **twenty-four weeks.** - That morning, sitting on the edge of the bed where I pray, I told God I wasn't going to church. I heard *"Be still."* I kept moving. - No gas, no money for gas. I prayed on the back of the truck in the church parking lot — and **heard nothing.** - In the service I couldn't sit still. When I finally sat down, the pastor closed on **Psalm 46:10** — a sermon written **two weeks earlier.** The gas money was handed to us inside that building. - At the hospital, it was **carved in stone** above the chapel door. - **"He got louder every time I ignored Him. And I could not hear it until I stopped moving."**

[If you choose, one line about Colton:] "I have a son on the inside too. I can't call him when I want to. I've had to learn this lesson on slow ground myself."

[12:00] Who learned patience with you?

Now I'm going to turn this around. Here's a question for you. **Who has been patient with *you*?**

Every one of us was somebody's slow ground once. Somebody raised us. Somebody waited on us — through the years we wouldn't listen, the times we left, the times we came back. Maybe it was a mama or a grandmother. Maybe a daddy or a granddaddy. An aunt. A teacher. A coach. A neighbor lady. Maybe a chaplain who keeps coming back in here.

[Jamie: name your own. First name, and one sentence about what they put up with from you.] "For me, it was ___. ___."

Here is why that matters. Paul says:

> **1 Corinthians 13:4** — "Love is patient and kind;"

That word "patient" is **the same word James used for the farmer.** So the people who waited on you weren't just being nice. **That was love, working slow ground.**

[Hold up the disciple copy.] On your page there are lines. **Write down the names** of the men or women who learned patience with you. *[Give them a full minute of quiet. Do not fill it.]*

And now one more name. Before Paul followed Jesus, listen to what he did:

> **Acts 8:3** — "he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison."

He put women in jail. And then Jesus saved him. And Paul said why:

> **1 Timothy 1:16** — "that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example"

And Peter says it's the same with you:

> **2 Peter 3:9** — "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you,"

Same word again. **God is the most patient farmer there is. And you are His field.** He has not given up on the ground He planted.

[13:45] Take it with you — two things

One: open your hand. *[Make a fist, then open it.]* Pick the one thing you squeezed at the start — the thing you can't control from in here. Tonight, say it to God and give it to Him. "Be still" means let go.

Two: be somebody's patient one. Somebody was patient with you. In this pod there is a woman who is hard to be around. You don't have to fix her. **Just**

don't give up on her. Let God grow something in you on this slow ground. *[And remember — being patient with someone never means going back to be hurt.]*

> **Galatians 6:9** — "And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up."

[14:40] Closing prayer

Father, we come to you with our hands full and our fists tight. We are holding things we cannot fix. Teach us to be still. Help us open our hands and let go.

Thank you that the ground is yours and the rain is yours. Thank you for every person who was patient with us — the ones who waited on us when we would not listen. Bless them tonight, wherever they are.

Thank you that you are patient toward us, and that you have not given up on the ground you planted. Grow patience in us here, in this slow place. Make us the kind of women who wait well and love long.

In the name of Jesus, **Amen.**

If you only remember three things

1. **One word for the mother and the farmer.** In Genesis 3 the woman's pain and the man's toil are the same word — used only three times in the whole Bible. Raising a child and working the ground are the same kind of slow work. Neither can be rushed.
2. **"Be still" means open your hand.** Psalm 46:10 is not "calm down." It is "let go — stop your work." You are not in control, and God is. That is the best lesson there is.

3. **Patience is love working slow ground.** The farmer's patience, the patience of love, and God's patience toward us are the same word. Name the people who were patient with you — and remember God is the most patient of all.

Then and now — the map at a glance

	Then — the people who first heard it	Now — our world, and this room
The work	Farming and raising children filled every day	Instant food, instant answers, next-day delivery
Who was in control	Nobody could make it rain or stop a fever	In here, someone else decides when you eat, sleep, and see a judge
Waiting meant	Normal life — plant, then wait on God's rain	"Something has gone wrong"
Psalm 46	A city behind walls, trouble outside they could not stop	Women behind walls, trouble outside they cannot fix
"Be still"	Let go — stop your work, God sends the rain	Open your hand — give God the thing you are squeezing

Discussion starters — if you have time after

1. What is one thing you are holding onto right now that you cannot control from in here?
2. Why do you think God put raising children and working the ground side by side?
3. Who is one person who was patient with you? What did they put up with?
4. Before tonight, what did you think "Be still" meant? What does it mean now?

5. Is there someone in here you could be patient with this week?

Read this lesson online — https://ps-church.com/discipleship/jail-ministry/slow-ground

The whole lesson is on the website, with the handouts. More jail ministry lessons are at **ps-church.com/discipleship/jail-ministry**.

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