Longsuffering

My whole life I never really understood exactly what longsuffering meant when reading the Fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5: 22-23.
I did understand that longsuffering, along with the other fruits listed, were character traits of God.
Traits that we are to strive to duplicate in our own lives that the world could see, but I just couldn't pin down exactly what longsuffering was supposed to look like in my life.
As it turns out, it's translated from a Greek word(makrothumia) that the English language doesn't have a simple one word translation for.
That's why the KJV says longsuffering, the NIV says forbearance, and other translations might say patience or tolerance.
It now seems to me to be a combination of patience and tolerance, but for a special purpose.

I think Jesus explained longsuffering in John 15: 11-20 when he told the parable of the prodigal son.
A story of a good father with 2 sons, one obedient and the other rebellious.
He did his best to teach them the way they should go, but the rebellious one was determined to go his own way, and when he was old enough, he took his inheritance and left.
The world he went into taught him, the hard way, the things his father had tried to teach him, and he lost everything.
When he hit rock bottom he remembered his father and went back to him in shame and humility.
When his father saw him coming, instead of being bitter, resentful, or gloating, he rejoiced.
He rejoiced that his lost son had come back home to him.
That, to me, is longsuffering.
The Fathers ability to suffer through watching his child make bad choices, but not intervene or punish, in the hope that his straying child would choose to someday return to him.

I wonder if sometimes, when we study God's teachings, if we sometimes get so caught up in the details, that we forget the big picture?
God made us all, and the purpose behind everything he does is to attract us, and persuade us to follow him.
His sole desire is for us to be with him forever, no matter who we are or what we might have done in the past.
He even allowed his own Son to be sacrificed so that would be possible.
He tells us through his Word how to make that happen, but he won't force us to do it.

Jesus said in Matthew 5: 16 "...let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."
I think what he was telling us is, to do our best, with our limited ability, to display God's character in our lives to the world.
That includes longsuffering, which is to be patient and tolerant with difficult people, or people who mistreat us.
And to withhold justified retaliation or punishment from them, in the hope they will someday choose to repent and find their way home to God.