

How does the reality that God hears the cries of the oppressed and suffering shape the way you pray when facing injustice or hardship?

In what ways might wealth or comfort be hardening your soul or creating barriers to faithfulness in your walk with God?

What are you waiting for right now, and how would your perspective shift if you viewed that waiting as ultimately anchored in the return of Jesus rather than just the immediate outcome?

James warns against grumbling and complaining during seasons of waiting. How does complaining compound frustration, and what practices help you maintain patience when waiting feels long?

The sermon states that waiting is not passive but requires active faith. What does active waiting look like in your current circumstances?

How comfortable are you with calling on church elders or other believers to pray with you during seasons of struggle, and what prevents many Christians from asking for this kind of support?

Who in your life might be a wandering sheep showing signs of drifting from faith, and what specific step could you take this week to reach out and walk with them?

How does living with the constant awareness that Jesus is coming back change the way you approach daily decisions, relationships, and use of resources?

The farmer illustration shows trust in unseen growth beneath the surface. What unseen spiritual growth might God be cultivating in your life during this season of waiting?

If Jesus returned today, would He find you faithfully putting in the work of obedience and love, or would you be caught off guard having given up or grown bitter?

## Small Group Guide: Living Now in Light of Then

Based on James 5 | "Put in the Work" Series

### OPENING PRAYER & ICEBREAKER

Icebreaker Question: Share about a time when you put significant effort into something (a project, relationship, goal) only to feel like it didn't pay off the way you expected. How did you respond?

### KEY SCRIPTURE

James 5:1-20 (Focus verses: 7-8, 16)

"Be patient then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming... You too, be patient and stand firm because the Lord's coming is near." (James 5:7-8)

### MAIN TAKEAWAYS

Trust the Judge, even when life feels unfair (James 5:1-6)

God hears the cries of His people

Justice is coming, even if we don't see it now

Don't let comfort and success harden your soul

Stand firm when waiting feels long (James 5:7-12)

Waiting is active, not passive

We're not just waiting for relief—we're waiting for Jesus

Your waiting has a deadline because Jesus is coming back

Stay prayed up and stay after each other (James 5:13-20)

Prayer is powerful and effective

We need each other to persevere

Go after wandering sheep—don't wait for someone else to do it

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### Understanding the Message

What stood out to you most from this sermon? Was there a particular phrase, verse, or illustration that resonated with you?

James addresses "rich people" in verses 1-6. How does the reality that we're among the wealthiest people in world history challenge or convict you? What does it look like practically to not let "wealth have us"?

The pastor said, "We're not just waiting for healing, we're waiting for a King." How does this perspective shift the way you approach your current struggles or seasons of waiting?

### Going Deeper

Read James 5:7-8 again. The farmer illustration shows active, patient work while waiting for harvest. What are some practical ways we can "stand firm" and remain active in our faith during long seasons of waiting?

James 5:4 says, "The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty." When have you experienced God hearing your prayers, even if the answer didn't come immediately? How did that sustain your faith?

In verses 13-16, James gives specific instructions: pray when in trouble, sing when cheerful, call elders when sick, confess sins to one another. Which of these practices is hardest for you? Why do you think that is?

### Personal Reflection

The sermon mentioned several signs of a "wandering sheep":

Stopping showing up to church or small group

Skipping serving opportunities

Expressing more doubt or discouragement

Increased negativity

Have you ever experienced a season of wandering? What helped bring you back? Or is someone coming to mind right now who may be wandering?

The pastor asked, "Does my money have me?" Take an honest inventory: How do you use what God has blessed you with? Is your wealth being used for eternal purposes or primarily for comfort and self-indulgence?

### PRACTICAL APPLICATION

This Week's Challenge: Choose ONE

OPTION 1: PRAY INTENTIONALLY

Commit to praying daily for someone in your life who is in a season of waiting, struggle, or grief

Consider reaching out to the elders to pray with you about something you've been carrying alone

#### OPTION 2: REACH OUT TO A WANDERING SHEEP

Think of someone who used to be more connected to church/faith but has drifted

Reach out this week—call, text, invite to coffee—and simply listen and love them

Don't lecture; just be present and pray with them

#### OPTION 3: EXAMINE YOUR WEALTH

Take inventory of how you're using your financial blessings

Identify one way you can use what God has given you for eternal purposes (give, serve, support someone in need)

Consider setting up or increasing regular giving to kingdom work

#### OPTION 4: PRACTICE ACTIVE WAITING

If you're in a season of waiting, choose one way to actively trust God this week

This might mean praying that same prayer again, loving that difficult person again, or obeying in an area where you've been tempted to quit

#### GROUP PRAYER TIME

Prayer Focus Areas:

For those waiting: Pray for group members who are in seasons of waiting—for healing, answers, breakthrough, or relief. Ask God to strengthen their faith and help them "stand firm."

For wandering sheep: Pray for people you know who have drifted from faith. Ask God to give you courage and wisdom to reach out to them.

For perspective: Pray that God would help us live NOW in light of THEN—that the reality of Jesus' return would shape how we live, give, love, and serve today.

For our community: Pray for specific needs mentioned in the sermon—families grieving, school district challenges, the Warren family, and global concerns.

For the Lord's return: Close by praying together, "Lord Jesus, come. Find us faithful when you return."

## LOOKING AHEAD

Before Next Week:

Read the next passage your group will be studying

Follow through on your "This Week's Challenge"

Check in with at least one person from your group during the week

Memory Verse: "Be patient and stand firm because the Lord's coming is near." - James 5:8

## CLOSING THOUGHT

"Waiting is choosing faith again. Waiting is praying that same prayer again and again. Waiting is loving that hard person again. Waiting is obeying even when no one applauds. Waiting is trusting when nothing moves in your direction. And the only way to wait without quitting is standing firm in the faith that the Lord is near."

The Lord is near. He hears you. He sees you. He's coming back. Live now in light of then.

## 5-Day Devotional: Living Now in Light of Then

### Day 1: The Lord Hears Your Cry

Reading: James 5:1-6; Isaiah 6:1-4

Devotional: When life feels unbearably unfair and your labor seems fruitless, remember this profound truth: God hears you. James declares that "the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty"—Yahweh Sabaoth, the Commander of heaven's armies. You may feel unheard, unseen, and cheated, but heaven has registered every prayer, every tear, every moment of injustice. The same angels who circle God's throne crying "Holy, holy, holy" are in the presence of the One who hears your voice. Your suffering is not invisible to Him. Before you seek revenge or give up entirely, cry out to the God who commands legions and cares intimately about your pain. He is both powerful enough to act and compassionate enough to listen.

Reflection Question: What situation in your life feels unfair right now? Have you brought it honestly before the Lord Almighty?

### Day 2: Wealth and the Warning

Reading: James 5:1-6; Luke 12:13-21

Devotional: James issues a sobering warning to the wealthy—not because money itself is evil, but because comfort can harden our souls. If you live in a country where you chose your outfit this morning, had breakfast, and drove to church, you are wealthy by global standards. Over 700 million people survive on less than two dollars daily. The critical question isn't "Do I have money?" but "Does my money have me?" Hoarded wealth, exploited labor, and self-indulgent living invite God's judgment. But wealth surrendered to eternal purposes becomes a tool for His kingdom. God hasn't blessed you so you can build bigger barns; He's blessed you so you can bless others. Living now in light of Christ's return means using every resource—time, talent, treasure—for what will last forever.

Reflection Question: Does your spending reflect temporary comfort or eternal investment? What is one way you can use your resources for God's kingdom this week?

### Day 3: Patient Waiting with Purpose

Reading: James 5:7-11; Job 42:1-6, 10-17

Devotional: Nobody enjoys waiting, yet James commands us to "be patient and stand firm because the Lord's coming is near." Waiting exposes our lack of control and tests our faith. The farmer doesn't dig up seeds to check their progress; he trusts the unseen growth beneath the soil. Job endured 37 chapters of suffering before hearing from God, yet his story didn't end in loss—it ended in restoration. Your waiting has a deadline. The world isn't spiraling aimlessly; it's moving toward a Person: Jesus. You're not just waiting for healing, relief, or answers—you're waiting for the King. This transforms everything. When you know the end of the story, you can endure the middle chapters. Faithful waiting means praying that same prayer again, loving that difficult person again, obeying when no one applauds, and trusting when nothing moves in your direction.

Reflection Question: What are you waiting for right now? How does knowing Jesus is returning change your perspective on that waiting?

### Day 4: The Power of Prayer and Community

Reading: James 5:13-18; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Devotional: James offers practical guidance for active faith: if you're troubled, pray; if you're joyful, sing; if you're sick, call the elders; if you've sinned, confess. Waiting for Christ's return isn't passive—it requires engaged, prayerful community. Elijah was human like us, yet his prayers stopped rain for three years and brought it back again. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. Yet we often try carrying burdens alone,

suffering in isolation, pretending we have it all together. God designed the church to be a praying, confessing, burden-bearing community. The elders aren't just decision-makers; they're shepherds called to care for your soul. Don't carry sickness, heartache, or spiritual struggle alone. Invite others into your story. Cry out for prayer. The Lord Almighty responds to the prayers of His people.

Reflection Question: Who in your life needs you to pray for them today? What burden are you carrying alone that you need to share with your church family?

Day 5: Going After Wandering Sheep

Reading: James 5:19-20; Luke 15:1-7

Devotional: James closes his letter with a mission: when someone wanders from truth, go after them. This isn't just the pastor's job—it's every believer's calling. Jesus' parable of the lost sheep isn't primarily about evangelism; it's about pursuing found people who've drifted away. Pressure, weariness, and isolation cause believers to drift. They stop attending church, skip small group, express more doubt, grow negative. These are warning signs. How do you respond? Reach out. Text, call, invite to coffee. Listen before lecturing. Acknowledge their pain. Pray with them. Be patient and consistent, returning again if necessary—just like a shepherd. Why? Because eternity is real, Jesus is coming, and souls matter. What we do now echoes forever. Whoever turns a wanderer back from error saves them from death and covers a multitude of sins. Live now in light of then.

Reflection Question: Who in your life has drifted from faith? What is one practical step you can take this week to reach out to them with love and encouragement?