

Patient Perseverance

What do you hate to wait for? What waiting experiences have tested your patience? Are there some things you feel have been worth waiting for?

James is writing to the first generation of Christ – followers. Jesus ascended. I'll be back. They thought a week or two, maybe a month. It's been years & it's getting more difficult for Christ – followers. Not just waiting, but suffering. Growing opposition to Jesus & growing persecution of Christians. Sound familiar?

This James study – “Faith that Works”. Isn’t afraid to roll up the sleeves, jump in and show it. But also, faith that works in the good, and not so good times. James is writing to people in the *not so good times*. Maybe that’s where you would say you are today.

James 5:7 (NIV) **Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains.**

The word *then* connects the previous scripture to this scripture and he is now telling his brothers & sisters in Christ how to endure their oppression & receive God’s blessing.

James tells poor Christians to be patient, even as they suffer at the hands of the rich oppressors who: hoard wealth, defraud laborers of their rightful wages, live in self – indulgence & rob/steal \$\$ from them.

Again, the early Christians likely expected Jesus to return during their lifetime. Most thought he would return at any moment.

James instruction to “be patient” was a word of *comfort*. A word of *hope* in the middle of their troubles & suffering. The word translated “coming” was originally used to describe the arrival of a king. *The Lord’s return or the coming of the Lord* was a term for the return of Jesus to end history & judge mankind. James was reminding the believers then, and us now, to *patiently endure* their suffering b/c Jesus would return as Savior & Judge the wicked in His time. *His time may be later than we want it to be.*

If this has a familiar ring to it, here’s why: James hits the *rewind button* b/c he opened his letter to the scattered church with the topic of suffering.

James 1:2 (NLT) **Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy.**

He opens & closes his letter with a call for patience in suffering. It’s a major theme of his letter (book).

James 5:7b (NIV) **See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains.**

Farmers illustrate godly patience. They work hard, plow the fields, prepare the soil, plant the seeds and then wait. And wait. And eventually they are rewarded with a good crop.

The Progress of Patience Begins with Adversity

Adversity. Troubles. Suffering. It's easy to think we have patience when we don't have problems, troubles or adversity. Or traffic slowing us down. When adversity hits, it's then we find out the make - up of our faith. Spiritual patience.

Patience: the ability to bear annoyance, misfortune, or pain w/o complaint, loss of temper, irritation, or the like. The word James uses for patience literally means *long – tempered*. Short tempered – everything sets you off. Opposite of that.

Joyce Meyer – “*Patience is not the ability to wait, but the ability to keep a good attitude while waiting.*”

James says patience is not passive resignation. Not throwing in the towel. It's making the most in the situation even though we cannot change the situation.

How do you view suffering? The world we walk & live in tends to have the mindset that if God exists, His purpose should be to make us happy. To give us what we want to satisfy us. Then, the reality of suffering in their personal world or the world around them smacks them in the face & blows that theory out of the water. If there's a God, He is:

Either powerless over suffering or indifferent to suffering. Why would I want to follow a God like that? I wouldn't either. Another option: *Sovereign over suffering.*

Not that God causes sin & evil, but that He is sovereign over it. That b/c of our sin-filled world, when we experience hurt & pain, our seasons of suffering are not wasted or meaningless. That in our pain and suffering God is present and working through it all, not to make us happy, but to make us holy. *To make us more like Him.*

We grow more in the valley than on the mountaintop. We get closer to God. Our faith grows deeper roots. We take our eyes off this world and focus on the one to come.

When we view suffering in this light, it isn't pointless. When we have a relationship w/Jesus, life will still be tough at times, we will go through valleys, but it is never hopeless, b/c God shows up in those valleys to walk w/us. To comfort us. Be w/us.

Even though we don't typically like to think or talk about it, the Bible doesn't *downplay* or *avoid the reality of suffering.* It acknowledges all the ugliness & pain of this life, but the Bible points us towards hope.

2 Corinthians 4:16 – 17 (NLT) **Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.** ¹⁷ For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

Suffering is for now, but not forever. Because of what Jesus did on the cross to defeat death & suffering, as a Christ – follower we know that we have the reward of heaven awaiting us. A season of suffering is a small assignment when compared to the reward of eternity with Jesus.

James again hits the rewind button to the beginning of his letter to the church scattered abroad: James 1:12 (NLT) God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

"God never said that the journey would be easy, but he did say that the arrival would be worthwhile." Max Lucado - Author

James 5:8 (NIV) You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.

Greek word: "sterizo". Set firmly, to strengthen, to confirm one's mind.

Doctor Luke uses it to describe Jesus, who "set his face to go to Jerusalem" in Luke 9. Nothing would stop him in his resolve, and James is saying nothing should keep us from completing our godly resolutions. When is Jesus coming back? I don't know. Bible never promotes that question. The Focus is: "*Will you be ready when He does return?*"

James 5:9 (NIV) Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

James understands human nature. He's in touch w/how people operate under stress. We tend to speak harshly against family & friends when we are under pressure and/or dealing problems, adversity, struggles or suffering. On edge. Words not as guarded.

People are watching us. God is watching us. How will we react & respond? Wronged. Ruins our day at work/school? Spew on loved ones? *Our faith is most persuasive when it is most tested.*

James again hits the rewind button on the DVR back to James 4:11 – 12 (NLT): Don't speak evil against each other, dear brothers and sisters. If you criticize and judge each other, then you are criticizing and judging God's law. But your job is to obey the law, not to judge whether it applies to you.

(NOT on screen) Jesus said in Matt. 7:1 - 2 "Do not judge, or you too will be judged.

James clearly instructs the church (and us) to this point to show patience, endurance and resolve. He has given a reason to do so; "The return of the Lord, the Judge, is near." Reward us, Judge the oppressors. He has reminded us that in our suffering, our adversity, our problems to be patient b/c eventually there is a reward waiting for us. Now he moves on to what it looks like, to *examples* of those who were patient.

The Past Faithfulness of God Can Bring Joy in the Present

Maybe you need this today. May need it tomorrow. Next week. Year. **Look back.**

James 5:10 - 11 (NIV) Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's

perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

James reminds us of two people groups: Prophets & Job. Prophet in the O. T. was used by God to communicate His message/truth to people. Also called "seers" b/c they could "see," spiritually speaking, as God gave them insight.

Led a hard life & spoke God's truth to the leaders, people of Israel & who didn't like it. It was risky, dangerous work. People were hostile. Many prophets were killed b/c of God's message. Others suffered pain, loss, & alienation from society. Kept at it *patiently*.

Jeremiah, Amos, Ezekiel, Elijah & Elisha are a few. Isaiah was sent to a people "ever hearing, but never understanding". James says we count them "blessed" b/c they persevered & endured. They didn't throw in the towel & give up. Received their Reward.

Another example is Job. Did nothing to bring suffering on himself. Not a sign of God's displeasure, indifference or judgement. God was greatly pleased w/Job's faithfulness.

Job lost: his \$\$, his children, his home & all his livestock but he never deserted the Lord. His wife: "Curse God and die". Job: "Shall we accept only good from God, and not trouble?"

"We have seen what the Lord finally brought about". God ultimately blessed and restored Job. Just b/c we may not understand our difficulties, adversity, struggles or problems doesn't mean God isn't in control or that He isn't working in them.

During Life's Difficulties, Let What and WHO You Know, Trump What You Feel

Two things typically happen here: The enemy begins to whisper lies. "See, if God really loved you He wouldn't have let this happen. You shouldn't have to go through this pain & suffering. He doesn't care about you. He has abandoned you. You're all alone."

This is often where the "why" question comes out. It is human nature, and we all ask it. We have this misconception that if we understand the reason behind our pain, then it will make the pain easier.

We don't need an explanation; we need strength. We don't need an explanation; we need a Savior. We don't need an explanation; we need comfort and support.

The reason for optimism in adversity is "The Lord is full of **compassion** and **mercy**." Compassion & mercy are more than synonyms for love. They are deep – seated emotions. *God's character doesn't change*. His compassion & mercy are not greater when things are good, and lesser when we are suffering through a difficult season of life. God ALWAYS has compassion for His followers in our suffering, and He is always merciful to those who are His children. He is a deeply loving, compassionate & merciful Father & we need reminded of that truth when the suffering becomes long & difficult to bear.

Life at times is messy. It's painful. There are problems & struggles. The fingerprints of God are often invisible until you look at them in the rearview mirror.

What are you struggling through, dealing with, suffering in right now? In what situation do you need the presence of God, who is full of compassion and mercy to show up? Where are struggling to be patient and wait on the Lord? God has promised to deliver us from this world. We have hope that the trials and tribulations of this world will not be forever. That as we are patient & faithful, eventually we will be rewarded. The Past Faithfulness of God Can Bring Joy in the Present. Let What and WHO You Know, Trump What You Feel.

Small Group Questions

1. What was challenging, convicting, encouraging, or timely for your current circumstances?
2. What do you hate to wait for? What waiting experiences have tested your patience? Share about a time you waited, and it was worth the wait.
3. Read James 5:7 – 8. Why should Christ – followers be motivated to patiently endure? In what way do these verses express a foundational truth for our Christian faith? How can they provide comfort, hope, and patience in real-life difficulties?
4. Read 2 Corinthians 4:16 – 17. When we're in the middle of suffering, why is patience so difficult to come by? How does patience allow our faith to grow?
5. Read James 5:9. Why does James mention grumbling against one another in this passage on patience? How can keeping in mind that God and others are watching us fuel our patience with one another?
6. Read James 5:10 – 11. Whose example does James say that believers in Jesus should follow? Why? Which example is most encouraging and comforting to you? Why?
7. What are some of your favorite promises from God's Word? Why are they especially meaningful to you? When have you found much – needed comfort in God's Word?
8. When has it been difficult for you to patiently persevere as a believer in Jesus Christ? How have Christian friends encouraged you to persevere in tough times? How can you pass that encouragement along and help others endure through seasons of suffering?
9. In what ways have you experienced God's compassion and mercy in your life recently? How can the promise of Christ's return help you face your daily struggles?