Bible Fellowship Teaching Plan for James 5: 1-12 (November 8, 2026)
Living Faith: Patient Perseverance in the Face of Adversity

Central Truth: Authentic faith is demonstrated by trusting God rather than earthly wealth, patiently enduring injustice and suffering, and maintaining Christlike conduct while confidently awaiting the Lord's return.

Key Passage (8): "You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

Supporting Scripture: Proverbs 11:28, Ecclesiastes 5:10, Matthew 19:24, Matthew 6:19, Isaiah 13:6, Romans 2:5, Deuteronomy 24:14, Genesis 4:10, Isaiah 5:9, Acts 3:13, Acts 7:52, Matthew 23:32, Psalm 86:15, Matthew 7:1, Ephesians 4:29, Hebrews 11:17, Job 13:35 and 19:25, and Matthew 5:33.

Opening Question: When you experience unfair treatment, persistent difficulties, or circumstances beyond your control, what's your natural response--frustration, complaining, retaliation, discouragement, or patient trust in God?

Background: James has consistently emphasized throughout his letter that genuine, living faith must be demonstrated through our daily conduct. His purpose is to encourage believers to become spiritually mature, "perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (James 1:4). In James 5:1–12, he addresses two distinct groups: 1) the wealthy oppressors (1-6)--those who trust in their riches, accumulate wealth dishonestly, withhold workers' wages, indulge themselves in luxury, and exploit those who cannot defend themselves; and 2) the suffering believers (7-12)--those who were experiencing injustice and oppression whom James encourages to remain patient, steadfast, and faithful while awaiting the Lord's return.

Lesson Objectives:

1) Recognize that the problem with wealth is not its possession but trusting in it, acquiring it dishonestly, and using it selfishly.
2) Understand the seriousness of God's judgment against those who exploit and oppress others.
3) Understand the difference between the world's "earthly, unspiritual, demonic" response to oppression and the pure and peaceable response of authentic followers of Jesus
4) Explain how and why Christians can patiently endure suffering while confidently awaiting the Lord's return.
5) Identify practical ways to strengthen their hearts and remain steadfast through difficult circumstances.
6) Recognize the importance of avoiding complaints and criticism directed toward fellow believers.
7) Imitate the patient steadfastness of the prophets and Job.
8) Understand that every authentic follower of Christ is to speak with transparent honesty.

I. The Danger of Trusting in Earthly Riches (1-6). Wealth is not inherently sinful, but trusting in riches, accumulating them dishonestly, and using them selfishly rather than responsibly is offensive to God and invites His judgment.

A. Earthly wealth is temporary and cannot provide lasting security (1-3).

1. James call the rich to "weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you."
2. The things in which they placed their confidence and found their identity are temporary and ultimately worthless.
3. Rather than storing up treasures in heaven, they have accumulated earthly possessions that will testify against them.
4. They have been accumulating treasure in the very days when God's judgment is approaching.

B. Wealth becomes sinful when it's acquired dishonestly and used selfishly (4-5). James identifies two specific abuses:

1. Defrauding workers of their rightful wages (4).
2. Living in luxury and self-indulgence (5).

C. Like animals being fattened for slaughter, the self-indulgent rich were oblivious to the judgment approaching them.

D. God will surely bring judgment upon those who exploit and oppress the innocent (6).

1. The righteous person most likely refers to the poor and helpless victims who cannot defend themselves against the wealthy and powerful.
2. Their inability to defend themselves does not mean God is unaware of their suffering.
3. The certainty of God's judgment should encourage those who are suffering to trust Him rather than envy the prosperity of their oppressors.

Discussion Questions:

1) Why does James describe earthly riches as rotting, moth-eaten, and corroded?
2) What is the difference between possessing wealth and placing our confidence in wealth?
3) How can material prosperity give someone a false sense of security?
4) What are some ways people today accumulate earthly treasures while neglecting eternal priorities?
5) How does Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6:19-21 reinforce James's warning?
6) Why does James place such importance on the treatment of workers and the payment of their wages?
7) What does the title, "the Lord of Hosts," tell us about God's concern for those who are oppressed?

8) How can a person's desire for comfort and luxury lead to selfishness and disregard for others?
9) What does the illustration of being "fattened" for slaughter teach us about the danger of living without considering eternity?
10) How might our own abundance prevent us from recognizing the needs of others?

Questions for Personal Reflection:

1) Have I ever measured my security or success primarily by what I possess?
2) Do my financial priorities reflect an eternal perspective or an earthly one?
3) If everything I own were suddenly taken away, would my confidence in God remain?
4) Am I investing as much in things of eternal value as I am in my earthly responsibilities and possessions?
5) Do I treat everyone fairly, regardless of their position, influence, or economic circumstances?
6) Am I more concerned with maintaining my lifestyle than recognizing opportunities to help others?
7) Has comfort or prosperity ever made me less sensitive to the needs of those around me?
8) Am I using the resources God has entrusted to me as a faithful steward?
9) Do I ever envy people who appear prosperous despite their dishonesty or mistreatment of others?
10) Do I recognize that God holds me accountable for how I treat people who have less power or influence than I do?

II. The Importance of Patient Perseverance in the Face of Adversity (7-8). Because the Lord will return, judge the wicked, and reward His people, authentic followers of Christ can patiently endure suffering and remain steadfast even when their circumstances do not change.

A. Patiently endure suffering because the Lord is returning soon (7).

1. His instruction to be patient is a call to active, deliberate perseverance rather than passive resignation.
2. Biblical patience means enduring provocation, delay, and hardship without surrendering hope or retaliating in anger.
3. The coming judgment upon their oppressors assures them that God will ultimately set things right.
4. Their suffering will not last forever, and the Lord's return will bring both relief and reward.

B. The illustration of the farmer (7)

1. A farmer must patiently wait for the early rains in October or November to germinate the seed and the late rains in April and May to mature the grain.
2. The farmer can't control the weather or the seasons. He must patiently trust the process while anticipating the harvest.
3. In the same way, believers must trust God's timing and remain faithful as they expectantly await the fulfillment of His promises.

C. The response of the authentic follower of Christ: Establish your heart in confident expectation of the Lord's return (8).

1. James repeats his command to be patient, emphasizing its importance.
2. To establish the heart means to become spiritually stable, unwavering, and immovable.
3. This stability comes from confidence in God's character and His promises.
4. Believers are not to be controlled by changing circumstances but strengthened by their relationship with an unchanging God.
5. The Lord's return is not simply an event to anticipate; it is a promise that should shape how we live today.

Discussion Questions:

1) What is the difference between biblical patience and simply resigning ourselves to unpleasant circumstances?
2) Why does James connect the believer's patience with the certainty of the Lord's return?
3) What does the farmer's dependence upon the early and late rains teach us about trusting God's timing?
4) Why is it sometimes difficult to wait patiently when we cannot control our circumstances?
5) How does the promise of Christ's return help us endure injustice and suffering?
6) What does it mean to establish or strengthen our hearts?
7) What are some practical ways Christians can develop spiritual stability during difficult times?
8) How does remembering that the Lord is returning change our priorities and daily decisions?
9) Why is it important to remember not only that Christ is coming but also who He is?

Questions for Personal Reflection:

1) When God does not answer my prayers as quickly as I would like, how do I respond? How should I respond?
2) Am I able to endure difficult circumstances without becoming bitter or resentful?
3) Do I trust God's timing even when I cannot understand His purposes?
4) What situation in my life currently requires patient perseverance?
5) How does knowing that our coming Judge is also our merciful Savior encourage us?
6) Am I developing the spiritual discipline necessary to remain faithful through difficult times?
7) Do I regularly remind myself of Christ's promised return?

8) Is my confidence in the Lord evident in the way I respond to uncertainty?

III. The Conduct of Authentic Believers As They Wait for the Lord (9-12).
Patient perseverance should influence every aspect of Christian conduct, including how we treat fellow believers, how we respond to suffering, and how honestly we speak.

A. Do not grumble against one another (9).

1. James recognizes that prolonged suffering can create irritation, frustration, and discouragement, and those experiencing oppression may be tempted to turn their frustration against fellow believers.
2. Grumbling against others is a form of unrighteous judgment. Our words should encourage, strengthen, and build others up rather than tear them down.
3. The five-fold test for our speech: before speaking, ask

   Is what I am about to say true?

   Is it kind?

   Is it necessary?

   Is it constructive?

   Is it Christ-honoring?

B. The examples of the prophets and Job in steadfast endurance (10-11).

1. The prophets

a. Frequently experienced severe persecution because they faithfully proclaimed God's Word (Hebrews 11:37).

b. Their steadfastness provides a model for believers today to follow.

2. The steadfastness of Job (11)

1. Job experienced extraordinary suffering and struggled, at times, to understand God's purposes.

2, Even in his suffering, he continued to trust the Lord: Job 13:15 and 19:25.

3. Ultimately, God restored Job and blessed his latter days more than his beginning.
4. Through Job's experience, we see God's compassion, mercy, and faithfulness.

C. Let your words be honest and trustworthy (12). James returns to the subject of speech, emphasizing the importance of honesty and integrity.

1. His instruction reflects Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:33–37.
2. Believers should not use elaborate oaths or exaggerated language to make their statements seem more convincing.
3. An authentic follower of Christ should be known for speaking truthfully and keeping his or her word.
4. Our words should be so dependable that no additional promises or assurances are necessary.
5. Using exaggerated language to manipulate others reveals a lack of honesty and integrity.

Discussion Questions:

1) Why does James point to the prophets as examples of suffering and patience?
2) What can we learn from the prophets' willingness to remain faithful in the face of persecution?
3) What does Job's declaration in Job 13:15 reveal about his relationship with God?
4) How did Job's confidence in his Redeemer sustain him during suffering?
5) What does Job's experience teach us about God's compassion and mercy?
6) How can the examples of faithful believers who have gone before us encourage us today?
7) Why does James emphasize honest speech immediately after discussing patience and endurance?

8) Why should Christians be known for straightforward, truthful speech?
9) How can exaggerated language or unnecessary promises become a form of manipulation?
10) What does it mean for our yes to be yes and our no to be no?

Questions for Personal Reflection:

1) When I encounter suffering, do I respond with the same confidence in God demonstrated by Job?
2) Am I willing to remain faithful even when I cannot understand what God is doing?
3) Whose example of steadfast faith has encouraged me during difficult seasons of life?
4) How can I become an example of patient perseverance to others?
5) Do people know that they can depend upon my word?
6) Am I ever tempted to exaggerate or embellish something to make my point more persuasive?
7) Do I make promises casually without carefully considering whether I can keep them?
8) Does my everyday speech reflect the honesty and integrity expected of a follower of Christ?

Summary: James 5:1-12 brings together several important characteristics of authentic, living faith. First, James warns against placing our confidence in earthly wealth. Second, James encourages suffering believers to remain patient and steadfast while awaiting the Lord's return. Third, patient perseverance must be reflected in our daily conduct. We must always resist the temptation to grumble against our fellow believers, learn from the steadfastness of the prophets and Job, and maintain honest, trustworthy speech.

Ultimately, James brings us back to the central message of his letter: genuine faith produces steadfastness, and steadfastness produces spiritual maturity.

Closing Challenge:

At the beginning of his letter, James challenged believers to count their trials as joy because the testing of their faith produces steadfastness. Now, near the conclusion of his letter, he shows us what that steadfastness looks like in practice. Consider these three challenges for the coming week:

1) examine your priorities. Are you placing your confidence in earthly possessions or in the Lord who provides them?
2) Practice patient perseverance. Identify one difficult circumstance in which you need to trust God's timing rather than become frustrated or discouraged.
3) Evaluate your conduct. Be intentional about encouraging fellow believers, following examples of steadfast faith, and making sure your words are honest and dependable.

We are not simply waiting for our circumstances to improve. We are waiting for our Lord to return.

Sunday School Lesson for November 8, 2026
James 5:1-12

Welcome to Sunday School on the go from the First Baptist Church in Tallassee. I'm Jim Glass, one of the teachers in the Pairs and Spares Class, and, on this second Sunday of November, we're nearing the end of our study of the challenging letter of James. Throughout our study of the gospel of John, we heard the Lord Jesus call His disciples to follow Him. In his letter, James shows us just how authentic believers truly follow Jesus so that we might become "perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

Throughout this brief letter, James has shown us the necessity of living a life that displays the authenticity of a living faith so that, in living that life, we would become "perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." In today's study from the first twelve verses of chapter five, James continues to build on this imperative, directing his words to two groups of people: the rich who trusted in their riches while abusing and ignoring those whose labor brought them their riches and those who were suffering from their abuse.

I'm sure you're well aware that the Word of God offers many warnings to those who trust in their riches. Solomon writes in Proverbs, chapter eleven, verse 28, that "Those who trust in their riches will fall;" and in Ecclesiastes, chapter five, verse ten, he says, "He who loves money will not be satisfied with money." The Lord Jesus addressed these familiar words to His hearers in Matthew, chapter nineteen, verse 24: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." And don't forget the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke, chapter sixteen, where the rich man cried out from his place of fire and torment in death, asking Abraham to "send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool [his] tongue, "for," he said, "I am in anguish in this flame."

In the first six verses of chapter five, we find some rather shocking words from James's pen, and his tone has caused some commentators to ask if he's

changed his target audience from Jewish Christians to unbelieving Jews of the dispersion in general, warning them of the judgment that would come upon the nation of Israel; but it's unlikely that they would hear this message. A second idea is that there were Jewish Christians in the church who fit this description, but we would hope that the individual behavior James describes would never be tolerated by any congregation of genuine Christ-followers.

Most likely, James is writing to encourage and strengthen poor and oppressed Christians who were suffering under the cruelty of their rich masters, so he uses this message, not so much to warn the rich, but to cheer the poor. We saw how severe the first ten verses of chapter four were, but James addressed his readers there as "brothers," and showed them how to reform their lives. We don't find this in chapter five. There's no affectionate salutation and no means for the rich to be delivered from their judgment. They are to "weep and howl," not in repentance, but in despair. The end is at hand; the day of reckoning is approaching; and the account that awaits them is fearful.

So, it seems that he's not expecting wealthy tyrants to read this letter, but those who were being exploited would read these words and know that James is able to identify with them in their situation. These words would not only have the effect of keeping them from envying the rich, but also encourage them to bear their trials with patience.

James begins this searing message by directing it to "you who are rich." Previously in this letter--in verses nine and ten of the first chapter--we heard James say, "Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation." Yet here, he speaks to the rich like one of the Old Testament prophets.

It's clear that James is speaking of two different kinds of rich people in his letter. First are those in the first chapter who humble themselves before the

Lord, ask for wisdom from God and rejoice through the testing of their faith as He guides them to "be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

Then there's the other kind of rich person--the kind he speaks about here in chapter five. From James's words here and from the rest of scripture, we know that there's no sin in being wealthy. Where sin exists among the rich, it comes from the dishonorable way their wealth is acquired and the way they use their wealth, but particularly from the tendency to trust in riches instead of trusting God. They're the ones who are not rich towards God, but who trusted in their riches and boasted about the abundance of their wealth, having forgotten what James has just said about the frailty of life and the uncertainty of the future.

James's words should have been an alarming wake-up call to those who fit in that category as he begins his denunciation of them by saying, "Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you." The misery that was coming upon them would create such overwhelming distress, that, not only would they cry over their condition, they would howl in their abject misery. In that part of the world, it was customary to express deep sorrow by loud cries, but this seems to be something akin to the extreme anguish promised by the Lord upon the nation of Judah in such places as Isaiah, chapter thirteen, verse six, where the Lord says, "Wail, for the day of the LORD is near; as destruction from the Almighty it will come!"

Althouth a few commentators think the miseries he speaks of here were centered in the coming destruction of Jerusalem, the poor as well as the rich suffered in that horrific event. James is announcing the wrath of God that will pour forth in vengeance upon this class of people. In fact, his words would have been easily recognized by his Jewish readers who had a well-constructed doctrine regarding the "last days," complete with a belief in a final judgment after death with rewards and punishments. With the first advent of the Messiah, his readers knew the clock was ticking, and the ingathering of Israel and the resurrection of the dead were coming ever closer. And we find some of those very ideas in the first six verses of this chapter.

Now that he has his readers' attention, James begins to name some of the factors that would play into their judgment. First, in the second verse, he says, "Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten." The rich had ignored the warning of the Lord Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount--Matthew, chapter six, verse nineteen: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal." Either through hoarding or decay, their wealth--accumulated in such things as grain and olive oil, has rotted away and become useless. Their garments also--one of the most prominent measures of the wealth of someone in that part of the world at the time--, having been stored for display in wardrobes where they became dinner for moths that ate them are now good for nothing. All those things that gave them their identity will follow their natural course in this world that is passing away and will have rotted and decayed into nothing of lasting value.

Verse three: "Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days." While it's true that gold and silver don't actually rust as we understand the cause and effect of oxidation far better than those of James's day, if kept in a damp place, these precious metals may develop a surface discoloration, especially if they contain trace alloys like copper. But the picture that James draws isn't a scientific description. "Have rusted" is the same as saying "are worthless," so it's a reminder that even the most permanent, earthly treasure has no eternal value.

Like the rotted riches and moth-eaten garments of the verse before, the tarnish on the gold and silver will testify against the rich. At the end of verse three, James writes, "You have laid up treasure in the last days." His reference to the last days is part of his appeal to the doctrine of the end of time and the final judgment that I mentioned earlier. In the Day of the Lord, all the shreds of cloth and rusted debris that remain from what was once the glory and

grandeur of their possessions would stand to testify against them and the worthlessness of their wealth would be their ruin, for they will have only been storing up all their riches to stoke the fires of hell. As a result, James says, "their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire."

Once again, James presents another appalling image, and its significance shouldn't be overlooked. Even though it's unlikely that any rich, Jewish unbelievers would have an interest in reading James's words, they should be warned of the unimaginable severity of God's judgment--a horrific judgment from which they cannot escape. Yes, they had been heaping up treasure for themselves, but it would not be the treasure they imagined. Instead, it would be the treasure of God's wrath that Paul speaks of in Romans, chapter two, verse five.

Just in case they have no idea what he's talking about, James points out the reasons for the severity of their judgment. First, verse four, "Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts." The laborers, of course, did everything by hand, and the physical labor demanded by the owner made for a long and painstaking day. But, when the day was over, the workers were dismissed without having been paid for the work they had done. This particular evil was frequently condemned in the Old Testament. For example, in Deuteronomy, chapter 24, verse fourteen, the Lord commands, "You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, …. You shall give him his wages on the same day, before the sun sets (for he is poor and counts on it), lest he cry against you to the LORD, and you be guilty of sin."

But this is exactly what the rich were doing. As a result, the hired servants cried out to the Lord, and the Lord heard them. Even the wages themselves poured out their lament unto the Lord, just as the blood of Abel cried out from the ground--Genesis, chapter four, verse ten.

It's interesting that the word we have translated "fields" implies, not just a few acres, but a considerable tract of farmland. This landowner was in no hurry to pay his workers; he could afford to put them off, or not pay them at all if he didn't want to.

Then there's the odd mention of "the Lord of Hosts" or "the Lord of Sabaoth" found in our New Testaments only here and in a quote in Romans, chapter nine, although it appears more than two hundred times in the Old Testament. It speaks of God as the Commander-in-Chief of the angelic armies and therefore the defender of the weak and innocent Who takes special notice of how they're treated and responds accordingly. If James had taken his cue from Isaiah, chapter five, verse nine, in speaking of the Lord of Hosts, that verse follows the Lord's warning "to those … who add field to field, until there is no more room, and you are made to dwell alone in the midst of the land."

These rich masters withheld just payment to their workers, and they enjoyed extravagant living at the expense of those they've defrauded--verse five: "You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter." This is a terrifying and graphic indictment. The rich he speaks of had completely rejected God's plan for the stewardship of their lives and were the epitome of self-gratification, totally oblivious to the fact that there would be a day of reckoning--like the man in Luke, chapter twelve that we talked about last week who said, "'I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you.'"

When you go to the grocery store to buy beef, you probably never think that what you're buying was once a happy, contented animal, grazing quietly in an open pasture with plenty of room to run and play with acres and acres of the choicest grasses to eat. Of course, your contented cow had no idea that it was being fattened for a day of slaughter it didn't see coming. James turns this image toward the rich and says, "You have fattened your hearts in a day of

slaughter." Speaking to people who have surrounded themselves with wealth, luxury, and self-indulgence who hoarded what they possessed and went so far as to cheat their own workers out of their promised wages, James's image is terrifying.

Again, the problem is not that they have wealth. The problem is what they've done with it, how they accumulated it, and what all their prosperity has kept them from seeing. Cindi Murphy writes, "That is what makes his warning so uncomfortable to hear. Abundance often makes us believe that everything is going well. But comfort is not always proof that our hearts are right with God. Sometimes it keeps us from seeing the needs around us--or from recognizing what our abundance is doing to us." For James's readers, the misuse of their wealth was only setting them up for a horrible judgment.

The third charge against the rich that James announces in verse six is this: "You have condemned; you have murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you." Is James speaking of a particular righteous Person, or is he using the title to speak in general of those from whom the rich had denied justice?

A few commentators think that James is speaking of how the rich had contributed to the death of the Lord Jesus. As Peter addressed those who had come to the Feast of Pentecost in response to the coming of the Holy Spirit, he told them in Acts, chapter three, verse thirteen: "The God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you." And, as Stephen, in his speech before the Sanhedrin before he was martyred, told them--Acts, chapter seven, verse 52: "Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered."

Given the context, however, it's not likely that this is what James had in mind. The present tense of "He does not resist you" could mean that Jesus

doesn't now resist the efforts of the rich to oppress the poor, but it seems forced to accept that interpretation. Since the letter is address to the twelve tribes of the dispersion, it doesn't seem likely that James would be writing about an event that involved only those in Jerusalem without making it more direct. Most important is that the context of his words clearly indicate that it's the class of rich people that he's been talking about in the last five verses who have condemned and murdered the righteous person, where the "righteous," "just," or innocent person"--relatively speaking, of course--is that class of people that's made up of those who have been the victims of the abuse of the merciless rich.

"He does not resist you" has also been interpreted in different ways. First, "He"--that is, the victims of their masters' oppression--don't resist their master because they can't. They lack the ability, the influence, the advocacy of someone who would intervene against the wealthy and powerful to force them to treat the poor workers differently. If the words apply to those "righteous" or "just" individuals who can't stand up for themselves but submit to this treatment patiently, trusting God, it's interesting to note that James himself was known as "James the Just," among his contemporaries.

On the other hand, some see "He" as referring to God Who no longer stands in the way of the rich to stop them from the judgment they are amassing for themselves, much as the Lord Jesus said to the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew, chapter 23, beginning in verse 32. God will no longer have mercy on the rich, but allow them to continue in their sin, hoarding up riches, holding back the wages due to their workers, giving themselves up to lives of luxury and indulgence, and oppressing those who could not defend themselves, adding moment by moment to the judgment they will experience.

The absolute certainty of the coming judgment James pronounces upon the rich would have undoubtably been a great source of encouragement to their victims--those who humbled themselves before the Lord and trusted Him even through their abuse and oppression, knowing that the Lord Himself would lift them up as we read in chapter four verse ten. So, he urges them in

verse seven: "Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. 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, for the coming of the Lord is at hand."

These words have an important contemporary application. Notice, first, what James doesn't say. He doesn't tell his readers to rise up against their masters and engage in class warfare. He doesn't urge his readers to depose or assassinate the ruling elites, demand reparations, call for a revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeoisie or the elimination of private property, or attempt to create a utopian, stateless society. In an era when oppression was far more extreme than it is today, James said, "Be patient."

Even in the face of unspeakable oppression, James calls his readers to trust God's plan. The one word in the original language translated "be patient" refers to an active, deliberate perseverance based on faith "that endures provocation, delay, or trial without surrendering hope or retaliating in anger. The verb occurs ten times in the New Testament and always [means] a steady, purposeful restraint that rests on faith in God's character and timing." We find this word used quite frequently in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, referring to God's attribute of long-suffering as, for example in Psalm 86, verse fifteen, where David writes, "But you, O Lord, are a God, merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness."

And note that James calls the oppressed believers "brothers," not with a possible hint of rebuke as he had back in verse eleven of chapter four, but here with true empathy as he identifies with them in their suffering and shares with them the blessed news of what is yet to come very soon.

One of the ways for them to be patient was to be assured of the unavoidable judgment that will come upon those who have so injured and abused them. He's just done that in the first six verses of this chapter, and the "therefore" that begins verse seven calls us back to everything he's just said

about that judgment. God will one day set the scales aright. He will loose His wrath against those who pursued self-gratification at the expense of others. Of this there is no doubt.

James began his letter by calling his readers to "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness." Now, he encourages them in that steadfastness as they meet trials of a very specific kind, reminding them that, as that steadfastness has "its full effect, … you [will] be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

Another way for them to be patient was to remember that the Lord Jesus is returning--not only to judge the world, but to receive His own--including them--to Himself. James was assuring his readers that--first with the Lord's return--their suffering wouldn't last forever; in fact, the end of their season of oppression is near at hand. Second, the end of this age would not only bring relief, but reward.

The "coming of the Lord" was something his readers would have been very familiar with, not only from their Jewish background, but also from the Lord's own words. The patient expectation of the sufferers would certainly be rewarded. As we've already seen, James shared the belief that was widely held in these days that Jesus Christ would return very soon to punish the wicked and reward the righteous. As one commentator notes, "Early Christians, in their eagerness for the return of their Lord, impatiently believed that His return was imminent; and St. James uses this belief as an argument for patient waiting and patient endurance. It is only for a short time that they will have to wait and endure, and then the rich reward [awaiting them] will be reaped."

As he did in the last chapter in speaking of the shortness of life, James had asked, "What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes." Here in verse seven, James tells them that the shortness of the interval between the present moment and the end of all things is a reason for

them to both watch expectantly and patiently persevere. And, just as he had done before, he adds an illustration from nature to reinforce his call to patience in the latter half of verse seven: "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."

The Lord Jesus used illustrations like this in several of His parables where the consummation of all things is compared to a harvest. The early and late rains James speaks of would have been very familiar to his readers, both in practice and in scripture. The "early rain" normally begins in in late October or early November. It's anxiously awaited because it's essential for the germination of newly-sown seeds. In the spring, the maturing of the grain depends on the "late rain"--light showers that fall in April and May. Without these rains, there would be no harvest. So, the farmer is naturally anxious and really has no other choice but to exercise patience while he waits for those two rains to come.

The farmer has no control over the rain, the sun, or the season. All he can do is wait patiently. So also, we can't control the events that are in God's hands; so we, like the farmer, must wait with expectant perseverance for the unfolding of His plan. For the farmer, when those rains do come, the precious fruit that he has waited for / so patiently / is joyously welcomed. So will it be when Jesus Himself returns and we feast at the wedding banquet of the Lord.

James then concludes his encouragement to patience in verse eight: "You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand." Just as the farmer expects the rain to arrive on time, so also are his readers to anticipate deliverance from their trials, just as we are to wait expectantly for the release from everything that burdens our hearts today.

"Establish your hearts." One word study says that this word "establish" or "strengthen" "marks a decisive action that renders a person … unwavering, and immovable. …[I]t points to divinely enabled stability that equips God's people to advance in obedience, endurance, and hopeful expectation." In

calling his readers to embrace this divinely established stability, James is urging them to stand firm and unwavering, assured of the Lord's return.

As they wait in confident expectancy for the Lord to return and the end of their suffering, James has several practical activities or behaviors that should characterize their living, active faith, along with a few illustrations. We'll consider the first two today and continue with the remainder next week.

In verse nine, James writes, "Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door." Once again, it appears that James is addressing a situation he's discovered or could be common among the churches of that day. Given the level of abuse some of the believers were experiencing, we shouldn't wonder that people would become irritated with their situation and start complaining, even to the point of blaming their problems on other believers. James is well aware of this danger, so he warns his readers about it and the consequences of doing so.

James has already spoken about the dangers of harsh and uncharitable speech; now he adds a warning about their being judged for their unkind words. Since the Lord is soon returning in judgment--even now standing at the door as it were--we ought not to be judging others with an unrighteous judgment--Matthew, chapter seven, verse one--, because murmuring or grumbling against someone else is a form of judgment. Instead, our words should build others up, as Paul writes in Ephesians, chapter four, in the 29th verse: "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear." Here's another reminder to use that five-fold test we mentioned earlier: "Is what I'm about to say true? Is it kind? Is it necessary? Is it constructive? And is it Christ-honoring?"

To illustrate what he's been saying in this chapter about humble steadfastness, James points us to consider those whom God had called in the

Old Testament to proclaim His word--verse ten: "As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful."

As you read the stories of these prophets, you find that their lives were often far worse than that of the oppressed laborers. These prophets--as the writer of the letter to the Hebrews tells us in chapter eleven, verse 37--, "were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated." If they were treated so shamefully, shouldn't we expect that others who pursued righteousness would receive the same treatment? And shouldn't we show the same patience in the face of trials as they did? For they showed us how we can / not just tolerate trials and tribulations in our lives but actually thrive in the midst of the world's oppression, knowing what awaits us was the same hope that inspired and sustained them.

If we admire their patient perseverance--if we count them "blessed" or "happy"--which we certainly do--shouldn't we imitate their patient perseverance as well? If patient perseverance was available and accessible to them, isn't it also available and accessible to us today? Of course, it is!

We admire the patience--"steadfastness" or "endurance" are better words to describe what James is commending here. We admire the steadfastness of Job as we watch him--albeit somewhat imperfectly at times--affirm his absolute trust in the Lord in such places as chapter thirteen, verse 35: "Though he slay me, I will hope in him;" and chapter nineteen, verse 25: "I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth." And we today have seen how God worked things out in Job's life in spite of his misunderstanding of God and His place for Job, how Job repented of His presumptuousness and how God restored him--we've "seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful"--and how "the LORD

blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning;" which would not have happened if Job had stopped faithfully trusting the Lord.

Having encouraged us to be patient as we expectantly anticipate the Lord's return, not complaining about our brothers and sisters in Christ, inspired by the steadfastness of faithful believers who have gone before us, James has another word of instruction about the content and character of our speech in verse twelve: "But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your 'yes' be yes and your 'no' be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation."

Once again, James takes his cue from the Lord's Sermon on the Mount--Matthew, chapter five, beginning in verse 33: "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No;' anything more than this comes from evil."

In those cases where the oppressed laborers he's addressing might find the need to express themselves in the most forceful way, either because of the frustration they were experiencing with their condition or in an attempt to inflate their influence, James says that no kind of oath is permissible for such a purpose. Not only that, authentic followers of Christ should be so well-known for their straightforward, honest speech that they wouldn't have any need for oaths or any kind of inflated language. Simply "let your 'yes' be 'yes' and your 'no' be 'no.'" The words of an authentic follower of Christ ought to be as good as an oath. If it is, no oath is needed. His or her word is sure and trustworthy.

If you add anything to your plain and simple words in order to inflate your position or the effect of your words, you're not using your words honestly, but using your words to manipulate your audience, and that's not from God--that's

from Satan himself. Any use of oaths should therefore cause us to doubt the truthfulness of what's being said. Among genuine followers of Christ, there should be no untruthfulness and therefore no need for oaths.

Well, James has covered a lot of territory in this brief passage. While not condemning the possession of wealth, he's directly confronted those who have hoarded their resources, withheld wages, lived self-indulgently, and exploited those who lacked the resources the wealthy have placed their trust in. His warning also exposes the danger of trusting in riches while forgetting the certainty, the ferocity, and the finality of God's coming judgment.

For the oppressed, James points his readers away from their changing circumstances and back to the unchanging character and promises of God. He reminds us that our endurance is sustained by our relationship with Him. His compassion and mercy give us confidence to trust him even when His purposes remain hidden to us.

James reminds us that patient trust in God produces consistency, taking us back to the very first words of his letter. Cindi Murphy writes, "We want suffering to end, answers to come, and circumstances to change. When they don't, we may begin measuring God's faithfulness by how quickly he gives us relief rather than by his presence and faithfulness while we wait. But James doesn't point us only to an event on the calendar. He reminds us who this coming Lord is: compassionate and merciful."

"The Lord standing at the door is Jesus--the same Savior who entered our suffering, showed compassion to the weary, and gave himself to rescue sinners. Friend," she says, "we are not waiting for a distant or indifferent ruler. We are waiting for the One who loved us and gave himself for us. Christ's death and resurrection assure us that our waiting has an end. The Savior who came once to bear our judgment will come again to judge righteously and make all things right."

"Until that day, we are not waiting alone. The Lord remains compassionate and merciful in the middle of our waiting--not only at its end. When we are weary, we can bring that weariness to him and trust that his apparent delay is not absence or indifference."

"Remembering who is coming changes how we wait. We don't have to turn our frustration against one another, manipulate outcomes, or say more than what is true. We can stand firm and continue living faithfully because the Judge is near--and, for those who belong to Christ, that Judge is also our merciful Savior." "As we wait on the Lord, our confidence in him should shape not only our endurance, but also our everyday words and conduct."

"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

Thank you again for being part of our study of the letter of James whose objective in writing this letter is so that we would each be "perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." Next week, we conclude our study with the final eight verses of this letter beginning in verse thirteen of chapter five where James will encourage us in the matter of our prayers, our sin, and our responsibilities to other believers.

As always, as it's still a good thing to do, keep calm, trust in the Lord, and wash your hands! God bless you!

The resources for this lesson include James: Christianity in Real Shoe Leather by Joel Gregory; Planting Roots unpublished manuscript, James: Rooted in Christ, by Cindi Murphy; The Epistle of St. James: The Greek Text with Introduction and Comments, by Joseph B. Mayor; Notes on the Bible by Albert Barnes (1834), text courtesy of Internet Sacred Texts Archive; The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, text courtesy of BibleSupport.com; The Expositor's Bible, text courtesy of BibleSupport.com; The Expositor's

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