

## Patiently Waiting in Stressful Days

James 5:7-9  
ABC 8/24/29

Do you know what the universal call of God to all His children is? It's the call to an uncomfortable place. We've been called to live in the middle of what theologians call *the already & not yet*. Already Christ has come. Already He's suffered & died & rose again. Already the Word of God has been given. Already the Spirit has been given. But not yet has sin been completely done away with. Not yet has the world been restored to what it was designed to be. Not yet has God's kingdom come in its fullness. We're called to live in the middle of *the already & not yet*. & we're called to do so in a difficult way for many of us. What is it? Wait patiently. Do you like to wait? Probably not.

According to a survey,<sup>1</sup> Americans wait:

- 32 minutes when they visit a doctor
- 28 minutes in security lines when they travel
- 21 minutes for a significant other to get ready to go out
- 13 hours annually waiting on hold for customer service
- 38 hours each year waiting in traffic (longer in big cities)

According to this survey, we spend approximately 6 months of our lives waiting in line for things, 3 days a year of lining up. The average person spends about 43 days on hold with automated customer service in their lifetime. Those who take public transportation will spend about 27 days of their lives waiting around on the platform or at the bus stop. We're constantly waiting. Waiting to be accepted into college, for a job offer, the right time to start a family, for a loved one to be saved, & on & on it goes. As the famous theologian Tom Earl Petty said, *Waiting is the hardest part.*<sup>2</sup> We think waiting is nothing more than passive resignation, giving into our circumstances, & throwing up our hands in despair. But from a biblical perspective, waiting isn't passive. As we patiently wait there's a radical transformation taking place in the midst of the wait. Waiting isn't just about what you'll get at the end of the wait. Waiting is about what you'll become as you wait. God is radically changing your heart. He's using the wait to transform you into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ so your life bears fruit that's eternal & to His glory. Waiting has meaning &

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<sup>1</sup> <https://logisticsmgepsupv.wordpress.com/2017/04/04/how-much-time-of-an-average-life-is-spent-waiting/>

<sup>2</sup> *The Waiting on Hard Promises* album, 1981

purpose. Waiting exposes the weakness of our hearts to doubt, to question the goodness of God, to wonder if He is truly with us, to wonder if He'll be faithful to His promises, if He'll provide as He's promised. There's a war being fought in your heart in times of waiting. Look with me again at the little letter James wrote to scattered & suffering Christian Jews. If you could have a textbook on what it means to live with faith in between *the already & the not yet* it's Js 5:7-12. That's what this passage is all about. **5:1-12** PRAY

The context has to do with **patience** (notice it 2x in 7, 8, & 10 which speaks of patience in suffering). Vs 11 goes on to speak of endurance or perseverance, a related concept we'll look at more next week. We should also note the context, because vs 7 has the word **therefore** which is there for the purpose of referring to what is in the text prior to this. & if you remember from last week it was about oppression & persecution by the rich (1-6). The connection is, *If you as a Christian have been wronged, be patient! The Lord will return soon & when He comes, He'll righteously judge everyone, including you.* A 2<sup>nd</sup> theme is the return of the Lord. He mentions it in vss 7, 8, & 9. The overall context has to do with the righteous who are suffering (6, 10, 11). They must keep doing the will of God, waiting for Him to come & judge the wicked & reward the righteous. While they wait, they must cultivate the godly virtue of patience. James gives us 4 commands in these 3 vss. The 1<sup>st</sup> one he gives twice.

### **1. Be Patient 7-8a**

We've probably all had a teacher or professor who said something along these lines: *I'm going to tell you what I'm going to teach you. Then I'll teach you. Then I'll tell you what I taught you. Then, I'll review.* That's what James does here. He commands, **Be patient.** Then he gives an illustration of the patient farmer. Then he repeats the command, **Be patient.** Then he goes on to give 2 more illustrations of patient endurance in vss 10-11 (prophets & Job). How patient are you? We've probably all prayed, *Lord, give me patience & do it right now!* We don't need patience when things are going smoothly. But when things go wrong, we need it immediately. It's hard to practice patience when things are going well, because it's easy to be patient then. But when things start going wrong we don't practice patience, because we're already frustrated & impatient! There's no

crash course to cultivating patience. The Greek word means *long-tempered*. If you have a short fuse, you're not patient. If you're easily frustrated with *stupid* drivers, you're not patient. If you're quick to find fault with others' imperfections, you're not patient. If you snap at your kids over minor things, you're not patient. If you can't stand it when things aren't done your way, you're not patient. Patience is the self-restraint that doesn't quickly retaliate to a wrong.<sup>3</sup> The word doesn't occur in classical Greek because it's a distinctively Christian virtue, which wasn't a virtue at all in the Roman world. For them, it was a virtue not to tolerate any insult or injury without taking vengeance. Patience is the ability to take revenge, but refuse to do so. Biblical patience is tolerant of the imperfections, faults, & differences in others. It gives the other person time to change & room to make mistakes in the process. Paul lists patience as the 1<sup>st</sup> quality that describes love (1 Cor 13:4). If you're not patient, you're not loving! It's a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22) & like all fruit, it takes time & effort to cultivate. Significantly, patience is a quality of God Himself. Peter, when writing about the delay in the Lord's return to judge the wicked, explained, **The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance** (2 Pt 3:9; cf Rom 2:4; 1 Pt 3:20). If God weren't patient, He'd have wiped every sinner off the face of the earth long ago! Our obligation is to be as patient with our fellow-Christians as God has been with us. So put it on your prayer list (for yourself, not for your spouse), & work at developing patience.

How long must we be patient? **Until the coming of the Lord**. James' readers were being wronged by the rich (5:6). They were suffering sinful injustices. James tells them to be patient **until the coming of the Lord**, which was **near** (7-8). Some would say, *What kind of comfort is that?* The Christian faith makes absolutely no sense unless what God says about eternity is true. That's why Paul wrote, **If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied** (1 Cor 15:19). **Be patient ... until the coming of the Lord**. The gospel doesn't end with Jesus on the cross or in the grave. Christians look to an empty cross, an empty tomb, a resurrected Lord who ascended to heaven & right now intercedes for us & who will soon come back to earth to gather His children &

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<sup>3</sup> JB Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians & Philemon*, p 140

bring wrath upon His enemies. We look to a glorified Lord who will come in exactly the same way He left: personally, powerfully, physically, visibly, victoriously, & gloriously. At His 2<sup>nd</sup> coming He won't be seen in a manger or riding on a donkey with palm branches around Him. It will be with majesty & with the armies of heaven around Him. Then the prayer He taught us to pray will be fully answered. **Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven ... For Yours is the kingdom & the power & the glory forever. Amen** (Mt 6:9-13). If we truly believe Jesus is coming back, & it can be at any time, this will change how we live. Do we really believe this? Do we live like we really believe this, that the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming is near? 3x in 3 vss, James speaks of the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming like this: **be patient until the coming of the Lord** (7). **The coming of the Lord is near** (8). **Behold, the Judge is standing right at the door** (9). It's been said the NT has 300+ references to Christ's return, one for every 13 vss.<sup>4</sup> If He isn't coming back, then Paul says, **let us eat & drink, for tomorrow we die** (1 Cor 15:32b). But if He is coming as the righteous Judge, then, **be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord** (1 Cor 15:58). But still, some critics insist, the NT writers & even Jesus Himself were wrong with regard to the timing of His return. When Jesus said that that generation would not pass away until He returned (Mk 13:30) or when James wrote, **the coming of the Lord is near** (8), were they wrong? Jesus didn't return within a generation. Is God a liar? Did we miss His return? No & no. So how do we respond? We have to understand the word **near** in the framework of salvation history. As we saw last week, the **last days** refers to the entire period between Christ's ascension & His 2<sup>nd</sup> coming. But the length of this age is unknown. Not even Jesus knew how long the **last days** would last (Mk 13:32). What this means is the return of Christ, as the next event in God's timetable, is, from the time of the early church to our own day, near or imminent. Because of this, we should live every day with the realization that Jesus could come at any time. Trusting in the Lord's promise of His coming will give you **patience** to endure wrong treatment, knowing He'll right every wrong. The word for the Lord's **coming** in vs 7 was used in James day of a sovereign king showing up.<sup>5</sup> The

<sup>4</sup> Kent Hughes, *James, Faith that Works*, p 222

<sup>5</sup> Ceslas Spicq & James D Ernest, vol 3, *Theological Lexicon of the NT*, pp 53-55

people in an ancient town or city may not have known exactly when the king was coming, but if they knew he was coming, it affected the way they lived. They wanted to be ready. This is one of the main & plain truths about the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of our Sovereign King in the NT. We don't know the timing but Jesus tells us we need to be ready always. How would you live differently if someone extremely important was coming to your house? You'd be getting the place cleaned up & presentable. What if the King was right at the door? That's the image at the end of vs 9, but the 1<sup>st</sup> illustration James gives in vs 7 isn't an anxious host but a patient farmer preparing for the coming harvest. He doesn't know exactly when it will happen but he knows it's coming & that affects how he lives each day in the present. I believe the point of vs 7 has to do not only with the sovereignty of the coming King, but also our responsibility as we wait. Farmers can't control the rain, but they must be ready for it or it will be disaster for his crops. **The farmer waits** but **wait** isn't sitting around doing nothing. A farmer must work hard & be motivated not by what he sees in the present or how he feels about working right now. He must work & wait with long-suffering patience & future-oriented vision. As Christians we must do the same. In Israel, the farmers would plant in autumn when the early rains came. The late rains came in the spring, & both were necessary for a fruitful harvest. Interestingly, every OT reference to the early & late rains happens in a context affirming the faithfulness of the Lord.<sup>6</sup> This certainly fits in with the theme of patiently waiting on the Lord, who is always faithful to those who trust Him. James' analogy of the farmer has 3 implications with regard to patiently waiting on the Lord:

**A. God's Purposes are Worked Out Over Long Periods of Time** No farmer sows his seed & goes out a week later expecting to see a mature crop. He knows it takes time. If he flew into a rage because the crop wasn't ready in a week or 2 or if he grew discouraged & said, *I'm giving up farming because it takes too long*, we'd call him foolish & short-sighted. Farming is a slow process. But if the farmer works at it & if God sends the proper rain, eventually it yields a harvest. Many of us have a very short view of things. We expect instant results. But genuine spiritual fruit isn't a quick process. It takes, not only time, but effort as well. Paul tells us to discipline ourselves for the

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<sup>6</sup> Moo, p 223, he lists Dt 11:14; Jer 5:24; Hos 6:3; Joel 2:23; & Zech 10:1 as examples of this.

purpose of godliness (1 Tim 4:7). Just as an athlete disciplines himself for his event, so we're to discipline ourselves for godliness. But we don't like that because it means hard work & a long-range approach. No athlete works out for a week & gets in the Olympics. It requires years of training. Spiritually, we'd rather have a quick fix. *Isn't there a seminar I can go to or an experience that I can have that will give me victory over sin & develop godly character qualities in my life? Aren't there 8 simple steps to follow?* No, it requires daily discipline for the rest of your life! James' readers were engaged in the struggle to be holy people. They wanted to grow in their understanding of the Scriptures & be obedient. But they saw the ungodly prospering. In fact, these prosperous evil people were taking advantage of them. Apparently, many of them were losing sight of the harvest at the end of the age. They were wondering, is it worth it to follow the Lord if it means hardship, self-denial, & suffering? James is saying, *Yes, it's definitely worth it, because at the return of Christ, He'll reward you & punish the wicked. Patiently wait for the harvest!*

**B. Although We Must Work the Harvest Depends on God** The farmer illustration assumes several things. For instance, the farmer must have prepared the ground, plowed it, & planted the seed, which takes faith. He has to take some of the grain he's stored up, put it in the ground where it dies, & wait, hope, & pray for it to sprout & produce a crop the next year. While he's waiting on that crop, the farmer doesn't sit around doing nothing. He's fertilizing, irrigating, weeding, preparing his barns for the harvest, & many other things. If a farmer didn't plow & sow the seed, he'd be crazy to anticipate a crop later. He has to work with a view to the harvest. At the same time, he depends on God to send the rains at the proper time & in the right amounts. Not enough rain & the seed won't sprout. Too much rain will flood & ruin the crops. If God doesn't give the increase, there won't be a fruitful harvest. Spiritually, it's the same. If godliness is the fruit of the Spirit, then we must sow to the Spirit (Gal 5:22; 6:7-8). If you don't use the means God has ordained (reading His Word, prayer, obedience, worship, gathering with God's people regularly, etc) you'd be foolish to expect a crop of godliness in your life. We're to have Christ's return in view as we work for a future harvest. Are you doing that? Maybe you're thinking His return hasn't happened

in 2,000 years. *Why should I work hard, discipline, & deny myself now for something that maybe another 2,000 years away?* The answer is...

**C. The Crop is Worth Waiting For.** James calls the harvest **the precious produce of the soil**. The crop is precious because the farmer has labored long & hard for it & his family depends on it for life itself. In the same way, our final salvation, when God will right all wrongs & reward those who've suffered & labored for His harvest, will be a precious thing. But, we have to wait until the coming of the Lord to reap the full benefits of His salvation. As Paul put it, when considering all his trials for the sake of the gospel, this **momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison** (2 Cor 4:17). The patience & perseverance of the farmer makes the end result all the more precious. If Jesus is truly **precious** to us, we should look for His coming, we should long for it. We should love it & live for it. The 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ has comforted suffering saints through church history, & perhaps one reason American Christians tend not to do as well in suffering is because we don't love & live in light of this doctrine because we're way too focused on the here & now.

## **2. Strengthen Your Hearts 8**

In addition to repeating, **be patient**, James adds, **Strengthen your hearts** (8). Patience is a matter of our heart attitude before God. Why should we strengthen our hearts? Because **the coming of the Lord is near**. This is our responsibility. We are responsible to strengthen our heart by refocusing our thinking on the Lord & His coming instead of wallowing in self-pity. What we choose to dwell on & think on is a choice we're responsible for & that makes all the difference in our life (Phil 4:8). The key to enduring through suffering, pain, tribulations, & trials isn't changed circumstances, but changed thinking. This was how the book of James began. **1:2**

The key is how we consider the trial. Who we consider, ourselves or our God? What we know & think about (1:3, the process God is doing in us, not the pain or suffering we're experiencing). Who we look to & talk to (1:5, God for wisdom or human beings to whine to?). Until we realize the cause of our turmoil & conflict is from inside us (4:1-2), we won't be able to strengthen our heart because we won't realize our heart is our weakness. *You won't get to the heart of your problems until you*

*realize your heart is your problem. As we wait patiently for our Lord to return, we need to fortify ourselves for the struggle against sin & with difficult circumstances. James' point is, when unbelievers take advantage of you, keep working for the Lord while you patiently wait on Him to come as the righteous Judge. As you're doing so...*

### **3. Do Not Complain 9**

**Complain** means to groan or sigh. It's what you do when you've had enough. 1<sup>st</sup>, your spirit is vexed. 2<sup>nd</sup>, you **complain** inwardly. 3<sup>rd</sup>, you groan outwardly. Finally, you begin to grumble against your brothers & sisters in the church. & we often justify ourselves in doing this. We minimize it & view it as a little thing. God doesn't. John Piper connects the idea of vs 9 with the patience of vs 7-8 in his book *Future Grace* with these words:

*Impatience is a form of unbelief. It's what we begin to feel when we start to doubt the wisdom of God's timing or the goodness of God's guidance. It springs up in our hearts when our plan is interrupted or shattered. It may be prompted by a long wait in a checkout line or a sudden blow that knocks out half our dreams. The opposite of impatience is not a glib denial of loss. It's a deepening, ripening, peaceful willingness to wait for God in the unplanned place of obedience, & to walk with God at the unplanned pace of obedience—to wait in His place, & go at His pace. & the key is faith in future grace...*

*Patience is the capacity to "wait & to endure" without murmuring & disillusionment—to wait in the unplanned place, & endure the unplanned pace.<sup>7</sup>*

When fellow believers wrong you, wait patiently for the coming righteous Judge, remembering He will judge you as well (5:9)! At 1<sup>st</sup> glance, vs 9 doesn't seem to fit the context. It seems James should have put it in back in 4:11, when he talked about not judging each other. But when you're under pressure from the outside (5:1-6), it's easy to take your frustrations out on those who're closest to you, even though they're not the source of your problems. The word for **complain** was used as an expression of frustration from the people of God while suffering in some way. The Jewish readers of James would be reminded of the grumbling, murmuring, & complaining of the Israelites in the wilderness under Moses as they tested God's patience again & again. How they whined about their circumstances, & murmured against their leaders & their life. In James 5, since they couldn't do anything about the oppressive & influential of their day (1-6) they were reverting to

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<sup>7</sup> pp 171-172

complaining & taking out their frustrations on each other in their own church family. The sin of vs 9 has been described as...

*The inner feeling of dissatisfaction & personal irritation at another ... a feeling of criticism & fault-finding directed against others. This personal feeling reflects itself in smoldering resentment that may display itself in an antagonistic expression ... Such a spirit threatens the inner unity of the brotherhood.*<sup>8</sup>

*It is our sad tendency to speak in anger & haste when under pressure. We speak harshly against family & friends when we are under pressure, sleepless, & oppressed. We grumble against each other when someone else wrongs us. If a great fool or a great foe ruins our day at work, we vent the tension on those we love. It is typical of James to point out that a disordered heart leads to a disorderly tongue.*<sup>9</sup>

If you have a difficult, ungodly boss who harasses you, it's easy to snap at your wife or kids over minor issues, even though they're not the cause of your irritation. What's forbidden isn't just the loud & bitter denunciation of others but the unexpressed feeling of bitterness or the smothered resentment that may express itself in a groan or a sigh.<sup>10</sup> Maybe you restrain yourself from saying something snarky or exploding in anger, but you roll your eyes or shake your head in derision. Your body language clearly communicates your disapproval. James says, *Don't do that!* As Warren Wiersbe says, *If we start using the sickles on each other, we will miss the harvest!*<sup>11</sup> Nothing destroys Christian unity quicker than a complaining spirit. We all know people who complain & grumble about everything. Are you one of them? I hope not. The Judge is just outside, about to enter, & He can hear what you're saying & knows what you're thinking. The image is a Judge about to swing open the doors of a courtroom, enter, & court will begin. Remember that in grumbling against someone else, you're ultimately grumbling against the Lord, who sovereignly put that person in your life at this point in time. Thus the Bible prohibits all grumbling, because it's ultimately grumbling against God Himself (Phil 2:15; 1 Cor 10:10).

James' teaching raises an important practical matter. Is it wrong to defend yourself or your property when unscrupulous people try to take advantage of you? Is he saying you're just to be

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<sup>8</sup> D Edmond Hierbert, p 273

<sup>9</sup> Daniel Doriani, *James*, p 181

<sup>10</sup> Donald Burdick, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol 12, p 202

<sup>11</sup> *Be Mature*, p 156

passively patient & let them run over you? Or, is it permissible to take action & to stand up for your rights? 1) Scripture clearly teaches it's wrong to take personal vengeance. As Paul says, **Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord** (Rom 12:19). 2) It's important to confront any selfishness or greed in your heart before you take any action. Any response motivated by greed, vengeance, or other selfish reasons is wrong. 3) If it's a professing Christian that's trying to take advantage of you, the 1<sup>st</sup> attempt to deal with the problem should be face-to-face. If that doesn't work, go through the church. Paul rebukes the Corinthians because they were taking each other to court, when they should have resolved matters within the church (1 Cor 6:1-8). We aren't required to be passive doormats to unscrupulous, evil people. But we are required to deal with our hearts, to make sure our focus is properly on the coming of the Lord & eternity with Him.

When you're wronged, whether by a believer or an unbeliever, wait patiently on the Lord who will soon return & judge every person. If you think about it, in heaven you won't have anything or anyone to try you, so you won't need patience there. It's a fruit of the Spirit for here & now, between the already & not yet. Are you resting, patiently waiting in the plans & purposes of your Redeemer no matter the circumstances? To respond rightly when you're wronged, wait patiently for the Lord. His coming is near. Even so, come Lord Jesus.