

## Faith that Works // Patience in Suffering

**James 1:2-4** lays out the vision for the book of James, "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."

We see James return to his original vision to be patient in trials and to be steadfast in the face of persecution rather than waver, complain, blame other people, or lose faith. God wants us to be patient until the coming of the Lord.

**James 5:7-12**, "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. Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. 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. 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."

Wait patiently for the coming of the LORD- to be people of character and integrity for the days ahead. How do we become people who are resilient in the face of trials and struggles? The hard truth is that we must struggle to become resilient. As a parent, we all have a normal urge to protect our kids, but when that gets out a control you can do unintentional harm. The term "helicopter parenting" was first coined in 1990 (Cline and Fay, 2020) to illustrate how parents metaphorically may hover over their children, like helicopters, ready to sweep in and rescue their children from disappointments and painful experiences (Cline and Fay, 2020). Arguably, by doing so, they are sending the message to their children that they are incapable of overcoming their own struggles and in need of constant protection from the dangers of the world.

In this recent era of helicopter parenting, research has found a 71% increase in reported psychological distress from 2008 to 2017 (ages 18-25). These figures suggest an unusually large increase of anxiety and depression in a very short period of time. There seems to be a lack of resiliency in our world today. So, the research

mirrors for us what the Bible clearly teaches: that people need to struggle in order to develop resilience. Healthy parenting is guiding your children through hard things. A good parent is available to their kids, willing to walk through the hard times, but not to rob them of every struggle. Because in the struggle is where we grow.

God is not a helicopter parent. God allows us to struggle, and to learn, and to grow so that we might become resilient and capable to withstand the trials in our lives. *Why is he taking so long? Why doesn't Jesus return now? Why doesn't he do something in my struggle right now? Why is he waiting?* Since the day Jesus ascended into Heaven until now, we have lived in the tension of waiting for Jesus to return.

**2 Peter 3:9-12**, "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God..."

Do you see the tension here? We want Jesus to come back because we want our problems to go away. But Jesus is waiting because he wishes none to be lost, and He desires that we live lives of holiness and godliness. It takes perspective to see this but, it is His mercy and his gift to us that He waits. In the meantime, He is looking for his people to be resilient in the face of trials. Some of you might be thinking, okay, I have struggled enough- I want Jesus to come back today!

In Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis wrote this to people who wondered why it seemed like God wouldn't intervene more directly.

"God will invade. But I wonder whether people who ask God to interfere openly and directly in our world quite realize what it will be like when He does. When that happens, it is the end of the world. When the author walks on to the stage the play is over. God is going to invade, all right: but what is the good of saying you are on His side then, when you see the whole natural universe melting away like a dream and something else - something it never entered your head to conceive - comes crashing in; something so beautiful to some of us and so terrible to others that none of us will have any choice left? For this time it will be God without disguise; something so overwhelming that it will strike either irresistible love or irresistible horror into every creature. It will be too late then to choose your side."

How we wait matters! Here are three impatient attitudes I have seen that people live by when they are going through difficult times. If you watch the news, if you talk to someone that is going through a difficult season, you will hear one of these three attitudes emerge. Maybe you hear yourself?

1. The naïve optimist
  - a. If only this would change then everything would be great...
2. The dark pessimist
  - a. There is no hope, everything is falling apart...
3. The helpless cynic
  - a. There's nothing we can do. It's just how things are...

But a Christian has a completely new view of how to deal with difficult times. The Christian view of the "meantime" is unique. We know the beginning and the end. We don't see history as evolving, circular, or random. We know we are not helpless, hopeless, or naïve to reality. We know that all of history is HIS story. All of time sits on a line that says Before Christ and After Christ. We know that when things are unjust, when trials come, when there is uncertainty or fear or struggles, when things seem wrong...we must keep the whole story in mind. We can live with hope and courage because Jesus is in the struggle with us. Jesus, the author of world, will come one day as Judge, and time will be no more. The Judge is standing at the door. But not yet.

**Matthew 24:36-42**, "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming."

Knowing that Jesus is coming, how should we live while we are waiting? What kind of character and integrity must the Christian grow in? With the end in mind, how do we wait? To answer that question, James gave three examples of how to wait with patience for the coming of the Lord.

## 1. Endurance of a Farmer

**James 5:7-8**, "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."

What does a farmer have to teach us about patience? Well, a farmer plants, and then he waits with expectation. A farmer is steadfast through drought and weeds, he works, and he waits. A farmer is not passive, yet he controls what he can control. A farmer does his part, but he can't make it rain. A farmer is consistent, even when it looks like nothing is happening above the ground. He waits for the early rain to get things going and the later rains to keep it growing. A farmer commits themselves to the whole process, from seeds to fruit. They work diligently while at the same time knowing they are not fully in control of the outcomes. God is not looking for frozen waiting. He wants us to trust Him, as we go. This is an active kind of waiting. A kind of waiting that prepares for Jesus to respond. Are you waiting with patience or are you frozen with fear?

## 2. The Long Suffering of the Prophets

**James 5:9-11**, "Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. 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."

The prophets endured all kinds of things. Jeremiah was known as the weeping prophet. Hosea was a prophet who God asked to marry a woman who left him again and again, and God asked him to preach of Israel's unfaithfulness. Elijah had great victories and moments of dark depression. The prophets were revered by Israel, but they were also men who struggled, held the line, and were willing to say the truth no matter what it cost them. It takes grit to be a prophet. Everyone wants to shut them up, quiet them down. They are spokesman for God, saying the truth regardless of the outcomes. These were great men who sacrificed everything to be with God and speak His truth. God does not promise us that everything will be easy. In fact, He warns us that we will have trouble. We will suffer as the prophets did.

## 3. The Perseverance of Job

**James 5:11**, "You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful."

Job's story begins with a view behind the curtain as Satan comes to discuss Job with God. Satan persists that he is only faithful to God because God blesses him so much. Job was wealthy, healthy, respected, and powerful. What would he do if all those blessings were removed?

**Job 1:10-11** (Satan speaking), "'Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.'"

God then proceeds to allow Satan to test Job's faithfulness. Job loses everything - his children, his wealth, his home. How would you react if you lost everything in a day?

**Job 1:20-22**, "Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. And he said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.' In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong."

Then Satan attacks Job's health. His whole body was covered with sores, and he sat in ashes, scraping his sores with a broken piece of pottery.

**Job 2:9-10**, "Then his wife said to him, 'Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die.' But he said to her, 'You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?' In all this Job did not sin with his lips."

Then, all his friends begin to give him terrible advice and question him about what he must have done wrong. Job's health, his wealth, his marriage, and his life was in ruins. But God comes and speaks to him. God proceeds to paint a picture of the universe He has created, the intimate details, the ways he is involved in all of creation- His power, His might, and most importantly His presence. And how did Job respond?

**Job 42:2-6** (Job answers God), "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore, I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. 'Hear, and I will speak; I will question you,

and you make it known to me.' I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."

Job was a good man who became a great man. Although he suffered greatly, he patiently waited and was able to see God.

**James 5:12**, "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."

The final call that James gives us is to be people who do not waver. Above all else, let's not be like Job's wife or friends who wavered, doubted, who were cynical, passive, and grumbling. James is calling us to say what we mean and to stand strong through difficult times. The world needs strong courageous people who do not run away from difficulty but trust God and stand firm to do what He has called us to do. We can doubt, we can cry, we mourn our hurts and disappointments, but we cannot lose our faith in the coming of the Lord. Jesus sees our suffering. He cares for us. He wants us to see His face in the midst of it. He is producing something in us that is eternal!