
Into Thy Word Bible Study in James

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James 5: 7-12: Patience in Suffering!

General idea: This passage is about standing firm, which we can do all the way from sowing the right seed to receiving the greatest harvest of the highest quality. It takes patience to work the land; one must clear the field, plow the dirt, plant the seed, thin the sprouts, clear the weeds, fertilize, irrigate, constantly take care of the plants, trim, pollinate, engage in the on-going endeavors of cultivating the soil, including measuring and evaluating, and then, glean the final harvest. Then, it is time for the next season. This all takes effort and time; it does not just happen overnight at a whim.

It is the same with our spiritual formation. We receive Christ into our lives, but that is not the end of the matter. Rather, it is only the beginning! Jesus plants the seed, the Spirit waters it, and then we embark on our great adventure, the cultivation of our own lives by the spiritual disciplines of Bible reading, prayer, learning, sharing, devotions, fasting, fellowship, and the like. Then, we are honed and trimmed so we can grow. This is a slow and glorious process; yes, this is what the Christian life is all about on this earth, as it is about the journey and not the destination. Our destination is already booked and secured; now, we are to concentrate on what to do while we are on our way to His Way! Even when others come against us to exploit and betray us, our purpose is to grow in our security in Christ. It must be His Way and not our circumstances. Then, our faith will flourish, even in times of adversity and sickness.

Vs. 7-8: The call is for patience. God is still in control, even when we do not see it. He will return. And, even if it does not happen in our lifetime, He is still on the throne and has our very being in His hands. When our eyes are on Christ, then our eyes are not overwhelmed by what we are going through in life. As the farmer looks to the rain, we are to look to the Ultimate Farmer, our LORD. He is our hope because He is our courage!

- *Patient* means “waiting.” The context infers waiting for the correction of injustice. We do not automatically receive God’s promise, except for our salvation; we have to wait for His timing, which is the best timing (Luke 18:1-8)! Those who transgress—who sin—will be judged! We can wait because we have hope in the greater purpose which is unfolding for us.
- *Coming of our Lord*, also called in Scripture the “last days,” means the “Messianic era.” It does not necessarily mean that time is running out. It is not a “time” reference but a period in time. Because of the phrasing in the English, a lot of spurious doctrine has been read into this phrase that is just not there in Greek syntax or meaning. *Last days* was inaugurated by the incarnation of

our Lord (Matt. 1; Acts 2:17; 1 Tim. 4:1; 1 John 2:18). This refers to the new and unique “covenant” (some call this *dispensation*) in contrast to the period of The Law. The point is that God’s unfolding revelation for us is His grace, giving us His fullness and the finality that is to come. Whatever eschatological view you have, all biblical views look to Christ’s second coming as the next great event in our redemptive history. Nowhere in the Bible are we given a timeline of when it will take place—just that it will. We are called to always be watching for it, but not be so obsessed by it that it takes us away from the main call of building His Kingdom and discipleship! Most of the Disciples, including James, expected the impending return of our Lord in their lifetime.

- *Farmer*, and his work of cultivation and harvest, are images of growth and the Day of Judgment (Matt. 12:36-37; 24:36; 25:31-46; Mark 13:32; Acts 17:31; 1 John 2:28; 4:17). This parallels the parables of Jesus in Matthew 13. A farmer was totally dependant (back then) on the rain, soil, and such for his crop. In like manner, we are totally dependant on God for our salvation and assistance in our spiritual growth. However, both we and the farmer still toil in the efforts to make it come about.
- *Precious/valuable* means very important and valuable, as it is a fruit of the earth to give us sustained life.
- *Fruit of the earth/yield its valuable crop* is an image of harvest, referencing judgment; it is good for the elect, but bad for those who reject Christ (Matt. 13).
- *Latter/Autumn...Spring rains*. In Israel, these rains come in October and November which amounts to three-fourths of the total yearly rainfall after the grain is planted. If these rains come early, the crop cannot be planted in time and the seeds will wash away. The spring rain comes in March and April just prior to harvest. Without it, the seeds never germinate. If it comes at the wrong time, such as the harvest time in June, the crop is ruined (Deut. 11:14; Jer. 5:24; Hos. 6:3; Joel 2:24).

An illustration from agriculture is so appropriate for us and our faith development because the example parallels the cultivation of a harvest as the culture of our faith; the efforts, requirements, and obedience, as well as trust in the Farmer—our Lord—is paramount. Without any effort, we will yield no results—no harvest. Yet, when we are being cared for and cultivated in Him, we will yield bounties of abundant, contagious faith that spurs on the cultivation in Christ of others!

Vs. 9: Do not grumble, as in *do not be complaining*. Don’t criticize, find fault, be irritable or argumentative, or whine to fellow believers—and definitely not to unbelievers. All that does is bring stress and misery. Yet, when we look to Him, our trust becomes complete. Our hope is fulfilled, and, ultimately, there is nothing

about which to complain. Yet, James still makes the case that we can and are called on to speak against what is wrong, such as oppression. It is our hostile orations that are in question (James 5:1-6)!

- *Grumble* refers back to James 4:11-12. This means we are called to patience toward other Christians as well as to non-Christians.
- *The Judge* means “imminence” and “last days,” and is a reference to Christ's second coming and the judgment (Rom. 13:12; Heb. 10:25; 1 Pet. 4:7; Rev. 22:20). This can also convey the idea that our life is short and our time to judgment even shorter, so we need to “wise up” in Him.
- *Standing at the door*. Christ's return is imminent, not necessarily in timing but in His actual presence amongst us. Whatever we face, it is only for a season and then it will be over! Our hope is our relationship in Him and in His return to come, not in what is going on around us.

We are called to speak out against injustice. You may wish to vent your discontent, but make sure you do not blow it out of proportion or just wallow in it for self-pity's sake. Complaining serves only to stir the discords of strife, increase stress, irritate others, and place the focus where it is not to be. There are times to get things off your chest, but it must be to actually get it off, not to keep poking at it so the stress sticks around and consumes you, drawing you away from Christ as Lord. When overwhelmed, seek a pastor or counselor to help you through it, but don't turn it into a problem that has no resolution. He is our resolution, our hope, our promise fulfilled. He is at the door; let Him in (Rev. 3:8, 20)

Vs. 10-11: James points us to the prophets of the OT as examples of faith in the midst of extreme adversity. Job was a great comfort to those who were in captivity. These examples help us to see the hope we have in Him, and give us perseverance and patience.

- *The prophets* refers to Isaiah and Jeremiah as the main prophets, and the others as “minor.” Most faced serious persecution from their own people who refused to heed God's call and warnings, focusing on their desires and transgressions instead. The point is that we can have endurance! When we preach or model Christ, we, too, may face great persecution; if so, we are in good company!
- *Perseverance of Job* means endurance, as Job went through great sufferings, and he persevered. James uses this to communicate encouragement for our *staying power*, as in “you can do it too!” When God seems far away and no one seems to care about injustice or your concerns, God is still there caring! He will vindicate you and care for you!

We can honor people who have been triumphant in suffering because it is encouraging and equipping to us. If they can do it, then so can we—so can you! Whatever may be seeking to derail your faith or seeking to take you off God's path, be it spiritual warfare, toxic family members, disgruntled work situations, or a debilitating illness, we can carry on because He appropriates us for a purpose; He carries us through!

Vs. 12: Do not swear! That is, as James said before, to keep our tongue under control. This time, the focus is on swearing, as in coarse language and paying homage to what is irreverent or irrelevant. When we swear to an oath that is not in Him, it is displeasing to Him. It is distracting from our call, and blatant sin! How we use our tongue will show how we have cultivated our heart! James speaks more on how to do this in verse 13, *to pray!*

- *Above all* is an emphatic expression meaning “this is priority;” God calls us to godliness, especially with our behaviors and words!
- *Swear...oaths.* In the Greek, *swear* means to grasp something hard for support. Here, it refers to a verbal agreement witnessed by divine intervention or an object that represents God. An example would be swearing by the temple that manipulates God as a witness to our position, promises, and dealings (Gen. 24: 1-9; Ezra 10:5; Neh. 5:12; Acts 23:12; Heb. 6:13-17). They would go through these long, elaborate oaths, then not live up to them. The OT Law forbids irreverent oaths, especially the misuse of God's name. It beaks the third commandment (Ex. 20:7; Lev. 19:12; Num. 30:2; Duet. 5:11; 6:3; 22:21-33)!
- *Yes be yes.* As Christians, with Christ living in us, we need not make any oaths as our word should indicate our faith. Our word is our bond; it must be trusted. So, do not be a deceiver or a manipulator! James and Jesus are not prohibiting all oaths; rather, it is for us to make very sure that whatever we do, we go by our word, rooted in His foremost precepts, so our behaviors are foremost and honest, especially since God is our witness. *Let your yes be yes*, not saying “let God strike with lightning if I do not”... (Matt. 5: 33-37).

Being a farmer in James' day was a harsh, life-and-death occupation, where one was dependant on and at the mercy of the rain and ground. There were no modern irrigation methods, fertilizers, or pesticides, just hard work and waiting; it is a perfect image of what it means to grow in Christ at times, as sometimes, all we can do is wait. We desire retribution and vengeance; He desires for us to wait expectantly, seeking Him with confidence. But, we do have irrigation, fertilizer, water, and pesticides in Him which are His Word, prayer, fellowship, and His Spirit! If we do not learn and practice patience, we will quickly become impatient, bitter, and bow to self-pity. When we wait, we are not in a hopeless, meaningless holding-pattern, for we are learning and growing in Him! While we wait, God is working, He is in control! He is compassionate and will

intervene, heal, restore, and bless in the fullness of His timing (Gen. 50:20; Psalm 37:7; 130:5; Isa. 49:23; Jer. 29:11; Lam. 3:26; Mic. 7:7; Hab. 2:3; Matt. 5:10-12; Rom. 8:28-39; 13:1; Gal. 4:4; Phil. 1:6; James 1:2-18).

Do you sow the right seeds—the seeds of faith and devotion to our Lord, with absolute trust and obedience in Him? If not, why not? Because, if our purpose in life is not lined up to His, we will only have broken circumstances and directionless pursuits that lead to emptiness and despair! When we do sow the right seed, we are prepared to weather the storms of life, because our roots are deep in our Lord Jesus Christ; our identity is in Him, and our hope looks to Him. The storm-tossed seas will massage us and not break us; our anchor in Him will keep us steady. The mooring ropes to tie us to His anchor are in our hands. He gives us the boat, the rope, and the anchor; we still have to tie them to one another, which we do as we grow in Him.

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see [Inductive Bible Study](#)):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me? How am I encouraged and strengthened?
4. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
5. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
6. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
7. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
8. What can I model and teach? What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. What are some of the things that cause you to lose patience or be overwhelmed? What has really tested your patience to the breaking point?
2. What does it mean to you to be able to stand firm in your faith with distinction, regardless of what you feel or face? How would your life improve with more development in this area?

3. What kind of encouragement would you need in order to have “staying power” if you were facing persecution?
4. How is it that when we do sow the right seed, we are prepared to weather the storms of life, because our roots are deep in our Lord Jesus Christ and our identity is in Him? What would you look like if this attitude permeated your life?
5. How can you have confidence that God is still in control, even when you do not see it?
6. Do not grumble—as in, do not be complaining. The call is clear; so, why do we still do it? What can we do about it?
7. How can being totally dependent on God assist you in your spiritual growth? What can you do to help your trust and obedience in Christ grow?
8. When God seems far away and no one seems to care about injustice or of your concerns, how are you helped through it, knowing that God is still there—caring, and will vindicate and care for you?
9. Why, as Christians, do we not need to make any oaths? How is your word an indicator of your faith? What happens when a Christian’s word is not trusted?
10. He desires us to wait expectantly, seeking Him with confidence. How does it give you perseverance in your life knowing that some day, you will see His purpose and marvel at how it made you better?
11. What can you do to make sure your circumstances—whether they include toxic family members, disgruntled work situations, spiritual warfare, or a debilitating illness—do not derail your faith or take you off God’s path?
12. What happens when your purpose in life is not lined up to His? What can you do about it and keep your “cool?” Remember, you can do it!