

## What to Do When You're Waiting

James 5:7-12

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How many of you find it difficult to wait? Listen to these stats.

- Each year we spend around 13 hours on hold.
- The average person spends six months of their life waiting in lines.

To bring it closer to home, we're all facing complicated detours due to the I-74 bridge construction and multiple road closures because of rising river waters [show picture of flooding].

Perhaps this map will clear things up for you [show map].

In addition, roadwork has started on 38<sup>th</sup> Street and our facility is going through some extensive renovation.

As we continue in our study in James called, "Faith Works," we're going to learn what to do while we're waiting. One of the most important lessons we can learn is how to respond rightly when we've been treated wrongly.

Last week we looked at how those with money were taking advantage of those living on the margins of life and discovered this truth: *How I steward my wealth reveals my spiritual health.*

Our text for today is 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."***

An important first step when studying Scripture is to pray and then make some observations. Let's pray and then dive in.

Here are some observations.

- This passage is linked to verses 1-6 by the use of **“therefore,”** which means this section provides a game plan when we're in a waiting room because of some kind of injustice.
- The tone is tender as James refers to his readers as **“brothers”** three times in verse 7, verse 9 and verse 10. This is in contrast to the opening verses in this chapter, which are rather terse.
- The word **“patient”** is used three times in verses 7-8 and **“patience”** is used in verse 10.
- The overriding focus is on the second coming of Christ. Verse 7 - **“until the coming of the Lord.”** Verse 8 - **“for the coming of the Lord is at hand”** and verse 9 - **“behold, the Judge is standing at the door.”** This can be translated as *“right on the edge; just about to happen.”* It's the next event on God's calendar. Romans 13:12: **“The night is far gone; the day is at hand.”** Those who are the most persecuted look forward to the Second Coming the most. Incidentally, did you know there are over 300 references to Christ's return in the New Testament? That's one out of every 13 verses!

Here's the main point for today: *When you've been wronged, wait on the Lord's return and do what's right.*

As I initially percolated on this passage, I struggled to find an outline. After poring over the text, this is what came to the surface.

- **Exhortations.** We're told what to do.
- **Examples.** We're told how to do it by considering three examples.
- **Examination.** We're called to take what we learn and apply it to our lives.

### **Exhortations – What to Do**

**1. Be patient with people.** Look at verse 7: **“Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord.”** The word **“patience”** comes from two words, meaning *“long-tempered.”* It's the idea of having a short fuse. One commentator

defines it this way: *“A long-protracted restraint of the soul from yielding to passion.”*

The phrase, **“coming of the Lord”** speaks of His anytime arrival. We must live every day with the realization that Jesus could come back this day. Because He’s coming soon, I must be patient with people. Drop down to verse 8 where James personalizes this call for patience: **“You also, be patient.”**

J.B. Lightfoot defines patience as *“self-restraint, which does not hastily retaliate a wrong.”* This was counter-cultural then and it is counter-cultural today. For Greeks and Romans it was a virtue to retaliate when wronged. James is urging us to refuse to take revenge, even when we’re able to.

Are you patient with the people God has put in your life? Psalm 37:7 says, **“Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices!”**

**2. Persevere through problems.** Look at the second half of verse 8: **“Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.”** The word **“establish”** is the idea of being stable and standing fast and was also used of being equipped. This same verb is found in Luke 9:51: **“Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem.”** This person is so certain of the Lord’s imminent return that he or she is not wiped out by what’s happening in the present.

The phrase **“at hand”** shows we must persevere because the Lord will not only come soon, He will come suddenly! I like how the KJV renders it: **“draweth nigh.”** The Lord is constantly drawing nearer. Verse 11 says we are blessed when we remain **“steadfast,”** which means, *“to bear up under our trials.”*

*When you’ve been wronged, wait on the Lord’s return and do what’s right.*

### **Examples – How to Do It**

We’re not only told *what* to do while we’re waiting – be patient with people and persevere through our problems; we’re also given some examples so we know *how* to do it.

**1. Keep waiting like a farmer.** Verse 7: **“See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and**

*late rains.*” I learned a lot about patience when I was younger by spending time on my uncle’s farm. In our previous ministry we had a number of farmers in our church. Farming is getting more and more difficult, especially for those now dealing with flooded fields.

In Israel, farmers would plant their seeds in the fall and wait for the early rains. Then they would wait for the late rains to come in the spring. A farmer worked while he waited but there was nothing he could do to guarantee a harvest.

To **“wait”** means to *“look for and expect.”* Steven Cole draws out some implications related to waiting patiently.

- **God’s purposes are worked out over long periods of time.** No farmer sows his seed and goes out a week later expecting a mature crop.
- **The crop is worth waiting for.** The phrase *“precious fruit”* means *“costly and esteemed.”*

Beth and I saw a lot of precious fruit when we went to the visitation for Amy Rowell on Tuesday night. For many years, Amy served as the director of World Relief, one of our ministry partners. While waiting in line for 2 ½ hours, we talked to a refugee from Nepal. He told us he was born in a refugee camp and lived there for the first 17 years of his life before Amy helped him get resettled in the QCA. He also told us other refugees from Ohio were driving in for the funeral. While we were in line, I heard someone else say, *“Amy gave something to everyone she met.”* Amy’s parents told us hundreds of people in Myanmar were gathered for a service of weeping and worship. At her funeral, Pastor Gregg said Amy would *“cross the street”* to meet those different than her to help meet a need. If you and I want precious fruit, we must walk across the street or office or classroom and reach out to those around us.

If you wonder how much longer you can keep waiting, focus on Galatians 6:9: ***“And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.”*** Psalm 27:14: ***“Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!”***

**2. Keep witnessing like the prophets.** We see this in verse 10: ***“As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.”*** When we feel like giving up or giving in, let’s look at the prophets who patiently endured and yet never stopped speaking in the name of the Lord. Jesus

tells us we are blessed when we are persecuted and then points to the example of those who went before us in Matthew 5:12: ***“For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”***

The issue is not that the people in the Old Testament were so great that we should be like them. Here’s the point – *our great God used ordinary people in great ways*. We would do well to spend more time in the Old Testament according to Romans 15:4: ***“For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”***

We can learn from the mistakes of God’s people and also model our lives after those who suffered with patience. Knowing biblical history is essential to our growth in holiness as stated in 1 Corinthians 10:11: ***“Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction...”***

I’m excited about our new series that will begin the weekend after Easter. We’re calling it “Glad You Asked.” We received over 100 questions and have categorized them into 18 different topics. Several of them have to do with the Old Testament. Here are two:

- Is the Book of Genesis trustworthy?
- How does the Old Testament apply to me?

On the weekend following Easter, we’ll address this question: *“If God is so good, why do I hurt so badly?”*

Hebrews 6:12 urges us to be like the prophets: ***“So that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”***

Hebrews 11, the “Hall of Faith,” lists individuals who trusted the promises of God while demonstrating patience in the midst of persecution. Listen to Hebrews 11:36-38: ***“They 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—of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.”***

I think of Jeremiah who was called the “Weeping Prophet.” He preached faithfully for several decades only to have negative responses from the people. He was chased down, beaten, put in stocks and thrown into a cistern to die. He spoke out

against false prophets who told people what they wanted to hear, never losing sight of what God needed them to hear.

And yet he wrote these words in Jeremiah 20:9 (NASB): ***“But if I say, ‘I will not remember Him or speak anymore in His name,’ then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I am weary of holding it in, and I cannot endure it.”***

Many of us have the mistaken idea that if we follow Jesus we won’t have any problems or deal with any difficulties. Not true. Let’s keep waiting like farmers and witnessing like prophets.

**3. Keep worshipping like Job.** Check out the first part of verse 11: ***“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.”*** To be ***“steadfast”*** refers to abiding under difficulties. Interestingly, James is the only New Testament book that explicitly mentions Job.

Three passages in particular show Job’s steadfast commitment to worship even when he was wiped out.

- Job 1:20-21: ***“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.’”***
- Job 13:15: ***“Though he slay me, I will hope in him.”***
- Job 19:25: ***“For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth.”***

Look again at verse 11, ***“and you have seen the purpose of the Lord.”*** God had a purpose in mind all along for Job, just as He does when you and I go through problems and persecution and stress and sickness. Let’s forge ahead and keep worshipping like Job did.

*When you’ve been wronged, wait on the Lord’s return and do what’s right.* Because the Lord is coming, be patient with people and persevere through your problems. Let’s keep waiting like a farmer, witnessing like the prophets and worshipping like Job. That leads us to a time of examination.

## Examination – What Not to Do

One of the speakers at Iron Sharpens Iron shared a helpful acronym to alert us to those times we are especially susceptible to temptation: H.A.L.T. We must be careful when we're...

Hungry  
Angry  
Lonely  
Tired

When we go through times of trouble, we must examine our relationships with others and our relationship with God.

**1. Don't battle against others.** We're given a warning in the first part of verse 9: ***“Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged.”*** To ***“grumble”*** means to *“murmur or groan.”* The tense indicates they were in the practice of grumbling, griping and grouching against each other. They had forgotten they were brothers and sisters, or maybe that's why they had turned on each other! Leviticus 19:18 says, ***“You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.”***

Instead of blasting others, Ephesians 4:2 calls us to ***“bear with one another in love.”*** When things are not going well, when we're being oppressed or persecuted or just having a stressful week, it's easy to take it out on those closest to us. When we're irritated we tend to attack others. The saying is true: *Hurt people hurt people.*

Let's not be “grumpsters” who throw each other in dumpsters! Nothing destroys Christian unity quicker than believers grumbling against one another. Our internal bickering and backbiting and grumbling and groaning can knock us off mission. Warren Wiersbe says, *“If we start using the sickles on each other, we will miss the harvest!”*

This is a challenge because most of us are natural born grumblers and a few of us are year-round residents at “Camp Complaining.” Many of us whine more than we worship and gripe more than we express gratitude.

It's incredible how many times God's people grumble, murmur and complain when they are in the wilderness. It's also astonishing how quickly their complaining starts. After passing through the Red Sea, they are excited to finally be free and so they express their praise in Exodus 15:1: ***"I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously."***

But almost immediately their praising turns into a time of protesting. In verse 22 we read Moses led them into the ***"Desert of Shur."*** "Shur" means a "wall." And that's exactly how they felt. They had run into a wall of despair instead of through a window of blessing. After wandering in the wilderness for three days, and having no water to drink, the people turn on Moses at a place called Marah, which means "bitterness."

After receiving water, we read in Numbers 14:2 that the ***"whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron."*** We get a sense of what God thinks about grumbling in Numbers 14:27: ***"How long will this wicked community grumble against me? I have heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites."*** In Numbers 17:5 God says He will rid Himself of ***"this constant grumbling."***

Israel's stumbling led to grumbling, which resulted in God's judgment. As a result of their mumbling and grumbling, 14,700 people paid for their protest with their lives.

The second half of James 5:9 gives us an incentive to stop grumbling and groaning: ***"Behold, the Judge is standing at the door."*** James catches our attention by using ***"behold,"*** which can be translated as, ***"Hey, listen up!"*** Notice he calls Jesus ***"the"*** Judge. He's not merely a judge; He is *the* Judge! His words exclude anyone else. The phrase, ***"standing at the door"*** means He is in the act of entering. Jesus used a similar picture in Matthew 24:33: ***"So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates."***

James is referring to a judgment hall with huge double doors that the judge would come through to hear cases. When tempted to grumble or groan against a brother or sister, don't forget Judge Jesus is about to push open the doors to begin court.

Galatians 5:26 states if you do a lot of complaining, it could be because you're conceited: ***"Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other."*** Galatians 5:15 is even more graphic: ***"If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other."***

Chuck Swindoll draws out four lessons from this passage:

- Don't focus on the situation, or you'll become angry.
- Don't focus on yourself, or you'll be filled with self-pity.
- Don't focus on someone to blame, or you'll begin complaining.
- Don't focus on the present, or you'll miss the point of what God is wishing to achieve in your life.

When you're buffeted by problems, don't take it out on the people around you. Next, we're challenged to not turn on God when trials come.

**2. Don't bail on God.** When it's hard to count on people and when our problems are cascading upon us, we can always count on the character of God. The end of verse 11 says: ***“and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.”*** God is accomplishing His purposes even while we are struggling with people and swimming in our problems. D.A. Carson states, *“Sometimes God expresses His love by delay, and by this means he teaches us such things as perseverance and faithfulness.”*

The word ***“compassionate”*** literally means, *“abounding in bowels of compassion.”* The Lord is *“full”* of compassion or *“extremely compassionate.”*

God is full of compassion and He moves His people to acts of compassion as well. This past Wednesday night, our students wrote letters to two teenagers they're supporting through the ministry of Compassion International.

We can count on God's compassion and His mercy. One of my favorite verses is found in John 5:17 in the New Living Translation: ***“My father is always working, and so am I.”*** I come back to this when I don't see God working. Here's a phrase I like to say: *God is always at work...and sometimes I get to see it!* John Piper is fond of saying, *“God is always doing 10,000 things in your life, and you may be aware of three of them.”* Psalm 69:16: ***“Answer me, O LORD, for your steadfast love is good; according to your abundant mercy, turn to me.”***

Sadly, the compassion and mercy of God are the very qualities we begin to question when we go through difficult times. Satan wasted no time trying to get Adam and Eve to doubt God's goodness toward them...and he follows the same strategy today. Whatever you're struggling with right now remember this: *the*

*Lord is full of compassion and has a massive amount of mercy for you. Declare with the psalmist in Psalm 119:68: “**You are good and do good.**”*

I wonder if some of us bail on God simply because we think too much of ourselves and too little of the Lord. We mistakenly think God owes us something good because we somehow deserve it. That attitude can lead to swearing or making false promises according to verse 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.**”

While many have died as faithful martyrs, there have always been Christians who made empty oaths in order to avoid discomfort or even death. Peter did this when challenged to identify himself as a follower of Christ in Matthew 26:72: “**And again he denied it with an oath: ‘I do not know the man.’**” Others like Ananias and Sapphira made outward promises they had no intention of keeping in order to keep looking good before the church in Acts 5:1-11. That didn’t turn out so well for them.

Here’s a summary of where we’ve been today: *When you’ve been wronged, wait on the Lord’s return and do what’s right.*

- The two **exhortations** tell us *what to do* – be patient with people and persevere through our problems.
- The **examples** show us *how to do it* – keep waiting like a farmer, keep witnessing like the prophets and keep worshipping like Job.
- The **examination** tells us *what not to do* – don’t battle against others and don’t bail on God.

As I think about Grow Time, we’ve been asking God to grow our faith, to grow our family and to grow our future. As I look at all the demolition that has taken place, I’m reminded that we too must ask God to tear us down before He builds us back up. The work is messy. Parts of our building are getting shored up and electrical and plumbing systems are being installed. This work is not always visible but it is critical.

Years ago, Ruth Bell Graham, wife of evangelist Billy Graham, saw a sign by the road: “*End of Construction—Thank you for your patience.*” Smiling, she remarked that she wanted those words on her gravestone. After her death in 2007, her desire was carried out. Her grave marker bears the Chinese character

for *righteousness* (she was born in China), followed by the words that made her smile.

Listen. We're all under construction! I've always liked the phrase, "*Be patient with me – God's not finished with me yet!*"

Some of us are frustrated with our own progress and we've become impatient. Do you feel like you've hit a wall? It could be because you're not saved yet. Perhaps you've been trying to fix yourself and you're discouraged because it hasn't worked.

Do you feel stopped and you're not sure where to turn? [show pic]  
Do you feel like your luck has run out? [show pic]

It's time to confess that Jesus Christ is the only way! [show pic]

Listen to what Ajith Fernando writes:

*Religion says 'attain.'*  
*The gospel says 'obtain.'*  
*Religion says 'try.'*  
*The gospel says 'trust.'*

You could turn to Him right now and trust Him by praying this prayer...

*Lord, I admit I am a sinner and deserve your just judgment. I repent from trying to follow my own way and now turn to you as the only way. I believe Jesus died in my place on the cross and rose again on the third day and now I receive Him into my life. Please save me from my sins and from Your righteous wrath. I want to be born again so I place all my trust in You and You alone. If there's anything in my life You don't like, please get rid of it. When I'm wronged, help me to wait on Your return and do what's right. I pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.*

We wonder if God's renovation work in our lives will ever be completed. It's hard to wait, isn't it? Brothers and sisters, let's hold on to Philippians 1:6: "***And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.***" This is another reference to the return of Christ! God is doing His good work while we're in the waiting room.

**Closing Song: “I’m Waiting”**

*I’m waiting  
I’m waiting on You Lord  
And I am hopeful  
I’m waiting on You Lord  
Though it is painful  
But patiently I will wait  
While I’m waiting I will serve You  
While I’m waiting I will worship*

**Saturday Night Membership:** Kevin (Cajun) and Lynn Pauley (Tim)

**Benediction:** *“Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”* (Jude 24-25)