

**A. Two \_\_\_\_\_ Responses to Suffering (7a,8)**

1. Be \_\_\_\_\_ (7a,8)

2. \_\_\_\_\_ Firm (8)

**B. Two \_\_\_\_\_ Responses to Suffering (9,12)**

1. Don't \_\_\_\_\_ (9)

2. Don't \_\_\_\_\_ (12)

**C. Three Examples of \_\_\_\_\_ (7b, 10-11)**

1. The \_\_\_\_\_ (7b)

2. The \_\_\_\_\_ (10-11a)

3. \_\_\_\_\_ (11b)

## Homework

- **Read James 5:13-20.**
- **Read Max Lucado's "Lesson 12: Prayers of Faith" (pp 115-24).**
- **Reflect on these questions posed by Lucado.**
  1. How would you summarize James's final instructions about controlling your speech?
  2. What advice does James give to the troubled, the cheerful, and the sick?
  3. What steps does James say a believer should take who needs God's healing?
  4. What kind of prayer makes great things happen?
  5. Read 1 Kings 17:1-4 and 18:41-45. What does Elijah's experience teach you about prayer?
  6. What does James say about the importance of guiding those who have fallen into a pattern of sin back to the way of Christ?
  7. What does the story of George Washington Carver tell you about the power of having someone in your life who continually prays for you and points you to God?
  8. James says "the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective (verse 16). When have you seen this to be true in your life?"
  9. James states that Elijah was human, "even as we are" (verse 17). How does this encourage you when it comes to praying for God to do great things in your life?
  10. What great things would you like to see God do in your life or the lives of others?
  11. What commitment are you willing to make to pray for those things?
  12. How can you develop more discipline and patience in your daily prayer life?
- **Bonus Journaling Question:** What is a situation that is troubling you right now? Write a prayer to God about it below.

**Introduction**

1. A few years back in WV, Deborah and I took off on a Friday afternoon and went to Bluebend, one of our favorite spots, for a picnic and hike.
  - b. All was well until, as the trunk clicked shut, I thought, “Where are the keys?”
  - c. James says, “. . . be patient and stand firm . . .” (Jm 5:8).
  - d. I found myself having to put these words into practice.
    - 1) I tried everything I could think of, but there is no trunk release except with the key or “clicker.”
    - 2) There was no cellular service in any direction for six miles.
    - 3) It was very frustrating!
  - e. I hate having to ask for help, but this time I had no choice. God sent me several blessings:
    - 1) a patient wife who set in the car while I went to get help,
    - 2) two new fishermen friends, who gave me a ride to cell service, and
    - 3) a good friend, who answered the phone and came to pick me up on the side of road and take me home for the spare key.
  - f. This was, in the grand scheme of things, a very minor problem. The world and life in general throw bigger problems our way all the time.
  - g. What are we to do when problems come our way?
2. We must be patient and stand firm without grumbling or swearing until the Lord brings our deliverance.
3. **Read James 5:7-12.**
  - a. James again addresses “brothers and sisters” in this passage.
    - 1) In 4:13-17, he addressed “you who say,” presumptuous business-persons.
    - 2) In 5:1-6, he addressed “you rich people,” who were abusing the poor.
    - 3) Here he speaks to fellow Christians, who are suffering abuse by the rich.
  - b. James circles back to where he began in Jm 1:2-11 and 1:12-16.
    - 1) “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance” (Jm 1:2-3).
    - 2) “Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him” (Jm 1:12).
  - c. Trials, tests, and troubles in this life are certain, and we must be ready to deal with them.
    - 1) James was not necessarily talking about trials like locking your keys in your car. Although his advice certainly applied to that circumstance, he was speaking about the bigger trials that come our way when we or others around us fail to follow God’s way.
    - 2) Trials and troubles that test our patience come from both ourselves and others when we:
      - a) hear but do not do the Lord’s will (1:19-27);
      - b) play favorites, especially favoring the rich over the poor (2:1-13);
      - c) have faith but lack action (2:14-26);
      - d) lack of control over our tongues (3:1-12);
      - e) follow earthly wisdom instead of heavenly wisdom (3:13-18);
      - f) are friends with the world and so hate God (4:1-6);
      - g) exhibit selfish pride and fail to submit to God (4:7-10);
      - h) slander others (4:11-12);
      - i) boast and brag about what we have done or will do (4:13-17);
      - j) misuse wealth and oppress others (5:1-6).
    - 3) Hopefully none of us are wronging others in any of these ways, but I’m sure that each of us has been wronged in at least one of these ways in the past and will be again in the future.
    - 4) So, what should we do and not do, when these trials and tests come our way in daily life?

## A. **Two Do Responses to Suffering** (7a,8)

### 1. **Be Patient** (7a, 8)

- a. It is not translated in our English version, but in the original Greek, James used the word “therefore” (Gk., *oun*) – “Therefore be patient.”
- b. Scot McKnight notes, “James’s rhetoric is more general in the word ‘therefore’: his logical inference is drawn from the total picture of God having heard the cries (v. 4) and having decided to act in judgment imminently” (McKnight, *James*, 404).
- c. “patient” (Gk., *macrothumia* – “long burning”) means “slow burn; to have a long fuse; to not be easily set off or angered.” This is a virtue lacking our society today.
  - 1) God is patient and long-suffering toward us. It is a key characteristic of his nature (cf., Ex 34:6).
  - 2) *macrothumia* is generally patience shown by a superior to an inferior.
  - 3) James implies that the abused poor are superior to their rich abusers.
  - 4) Why? God has heard the cries of the poor, and his righteous judgment is coming on the rich.
- d. McKnight says, “. . . we encounter an emphasis on patience and perseverance in an eschatological framework: that is, because the Lord is coming soon as Judge, the readers are to be patient. . . . James knows that hotheads in the messianic community are tempted to strike back with violence (1:19-21; 2:11; 4:1-12; 5:6). Once we tie 5:7-11, where God is the Judge, to 5:1-6, where God is about to act in judgment, the meaning of both patience and perseverance is shaped eschatologically to mean the choice to wait for God’s judgment instead of taking matters in one’s own (bloody) hands” (McKnight, 405).
- e. Verse 8 begins with a second admonition to “be patient.”
  - 1) James builds a patience layer cake (vss. 7a, 8a) with an example of patience as the filling (v. 7b).
  - 2) Later we will examine his example of patience in vs. 7b.

### 2. **Stand Firm** (8)

- a. “stand firm” (Gk., *steridzo*) means “strengthen, make firm, establish, support heavy weight.”
  - 1) Building fence as boy, I held tension with the block and tackle. Dad said, “Hold what ya got!”
  - 2) Holding what ya got in the face of adversity can be a big job, but thankfully our God is bigger.
- b. How long do we have to be patient and stand firm in the face of oppression?
  - 1) James said, “until the Lord’s coming (Gk., *parousia*)” in vs. 7.
  - 2) Again in vs. 8, he emphasizes “the Lord’s coming is near.”
- c. The “coming of the Lord” gives hope to the oppressed that a time of judgment, of vindication, and of setting things right is near. They can hold on a little longer.
  - 1) In Paul, the *parousia* typically points to the second coming of Jesus, but that is most likely not what James had in mind here, in my opinion.
  - 2) I agree with Scot McKnight that “. . . *parousia* here refers to the manifestation of God’s (the Father’s ) righteous judgment and establishment of justice in the destruction of Jerusalem” (McKnight, 408).
  - 3) This is another indicator of an early date for James before 70AD.
  - 4) The “coming of the Lord” is an expression of the hope promised in Dt 32:35 that God will punish rebellious oppressors.
  - 5) God promised, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them” (Dt 32:35).
- d. We too look forward to ultimate vindication at the Lord’s return, but we also know that Jesus is present with us right now in our trials and temptations. He is here with us by his Holy Spirit providing the help and strength we need to be patient and stand firm, if we will turn to him, seeking his way and not our own.

## B. Two Do Not Responses to Suffering (9, 12)

### 1. Don't Grumble (9)

- a. "Don't grumble against one another . . ."
- b. "grumble" (Gk., *stenadzo*) means "groan, sigh, moan, or complain."
  - 1) Hmmm!
  - 2) An unexpressed attitude of bearing a grudge; the forerunner of deep-seated bitterness and hatred
  - 3) It is a negative judgment of others. Such as "They have it easier than I do!"
- c. Note that the focus of the grumbling is not the rich oppressors but "against each other . . ."
- d. McKnight notes, "One must imagine that the oppressive conditions led to the temptation not only to violence but also to turning against others (and God). Oppression leads to consternation and the yearning desire to find a way out. James knows this so he counsels the messianic community not to let their anger turn to grumbling, wrathful violence, yearning to climb over one another" (414).
- e. When we face trials and troubles, we tend to grumble not only about those who oppress us but also about our friends and family who aren't helping us, seem not to care, or have it easier than we do.
  - 1) We often lash out at the innocent and those who are close. They are easy targets in our frustration.
  - 2) We retreat into self-pity instead of into the compassionate arms of God.
  - 3) What should we do instead of grumbling?
    - a) Identify the source of the problem. It may be YOU.
    - b) Face the problem – "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (Jm 4:7).
    - c) Admit that you like to grumble, and seek the Lord's help not to do so.
    - d) Seek and release the love, power, forgiveness, compassion, and mercy of God into your life and into the lives of others involved in the trial/trouble.
    - e) Wait patiently for God to vindicate/deliver you without taking revenge into your own hands.
- f. Remember an important reason not to grumble is that the Judge (God) is at the door. He judges us too!

### 2. Don't Swear (12)

- a. "Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear . . ."
- b. "Above all" (Gk., *hupo panton*) is not a statement that this command is more important than those that precede it (i.e., be patient, stand firm, don't grumble). It is an introductory expression (e.g., finally, lastly, in conclusion).
- c. "swear" (Gk., *omnuete*) means to take an oath that what one says is true.
- d. How does this command connect to the theme of how to handle times of oppression?
  - 1) Many commentators treat it as a separate and somewhat disjoint command at the end of the letter.
  - 2) I see a connection in that when we are tested and tried by others it is easy to lash out with a verbal assault that contains vain statements of what we will do to our oppressor as we call on God to support our vindictive rant. "By G-d, I'm going to . . ."
  - 3) James has focused our attention on the power of the tongue and our lack of control in using it.
  - 4) Instead of a verbal tirade that belies an attitude of grumbling and may lead to inappropriate, even violent, action, we are to put our trust in God as our defender and vindicator.
- e. If this command sounds familiar, it is because there is a substantial connection between what James says here and the words of Jesus in Mt 5:33-37.
  - 1) **Read Mt 5:33-37.**
  - 2) McKnight observes, ". . . the text of James is a literary deposit of an oral tradition that goes back to Jesus. In other words, James has made the words of Jesus his own. He gives us a verbal quotation. Matthew's fuller text suggests that James is the more primitive account of the words of Jesus, but the evidence is not clear enough to give the historian confidence . . . What ought to surprise us more is that James feels no compulsion to say that he is quoting Jesus" (McKnight, 426).
- f. Warren Wiersbe concludes, "It is a basic principle that true Christian character requires few words. The person who must use many words (including oaths) to convince us has something wrong with his character and must bolster his weakness by using words. If you are a true Christian, with integrity, then all you have to say is yes or no and people will believe you" (Wiersbe, *Be Mature*, 169).

### C. Three Examples of Patience (7b, 10-11)

Wiersbe asks, “What three examples of patience does James give? Which of these resonate with you? Why?” (Wiersbe, *Be Mature*, 171).

#### 1. The Farmer (7b)

- a. In Palestine farmers are dependent on the “autumn and spring rains” for the success of their crops.
  - 1) Early rain in October prepares the ground and helps germinate the seed.
  - 2) Latter rain in April ripens the fruit/grain for harvest in May through September.
  - 3) These rains are critical to the agricultural cycle in Palestine, and without them crops would fail.
- b. The farmer must be patient. He can’t hurry the cycle. He must wait patiently on God to send the rain, germinate the seed, and mature the harvest. In this process the farmer faces many tests and trials—heat, cold, drought, flood, pests, disease, birds, deer, etc.
- c. Like the farmer, we must wait patiently for the Lord to do what only he can—send the rain (e.g., blessings; the way through trials) and the fruit (e.g., perseverance; eternal life).
- d. We can’t hurry God’s plan; He is coming; Be patient!
- e. God promised sufficient rain for the harvest (cf., Dt 11:14) and the farmer patiently waited for God to fulfill his promise. So, we must wait patiently for God to fulfill his promises of deliverance from oppressors and his just vengeance.

#### 2. The Prophets (10-11a)

- a. Jewish history both biblical and extrabiblical reveals that most of God’s prophets were mistreated.
  - 1) Elijah had a bounty placed on his head by wicked Queen Jezebel.
  - 2) Isaiah traditionally was sawed in half by wicked King Manasseh.
  - 3) Jeremiah faced a death sentence and was thrown into an empty cistern.
  - 4) And, of course, we know that Jesus was crucified.
- b. The prophets are great examples of patience and standing firm in the face of tests and trials.
- c. James’s words are an echo of Jesus’ teaching at the end of the Beatitudes: “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Mt 5:11-12).

#### 3. Job (11b)

- a. James wanted his readers to remember that while Job suffered, he waited on the Lord. Ultimately, God delivered and vindicated him.
- b. McKnight observes, “Job’s story tells us in no uncertain terms that he complained. But any reading of Job reveals a character who stuck it out, who trusted in God, and who did so fully aware of the fundamental injustice he had experienced. Maybe, then, Job is the perfect example for the oppressed poor. Patience here need not be understood as quietude or passivity; perhaps genuine patience involves realities like protesting to God, yet without surrendering one’s integrity or one’s faith in God or losing the path of following Jesus” (McKnight, 420).
- c. Wiersbe writes, “God permits Satan to try His children, but He always limits the extent of the enemy’s power (Job 1:12; 2:6). When you find yourself in the fire, remember that God keeps His gracious hand on the thermostat! ‘But he knoweth the way that I take; when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold’ (Job 23:10)” (Wiersbe, *Be Mature*, 168).
- d. McKnight concludes, “. . . James 1:3-4 teaches that tests of faith lead to endurance (*hypomone*) and endurance builds maturity; 1:12 teaches that the one who endures (*hypomene*) temptation/testing will receive the “crown of life”: and now in the context of severe trial (5:1-6), the messianists are exhorted to take suffering prophets and Job as their example—and to wait for God’s timing in judgment (5:7-11). For James perseverance has to do with human will, the building of Christian character, connection to the story of God’s people, and final destiny” (McKnight, 419).

#### 4. Trials, tests, and troubles in this life are certain to come against all of us.

- a. When they come, patiently stand firm without grumbling and swearing until the Lord brings deliverance in his time and way.
- b. Trust in our compassionate, merciful God (Jm 5:11c).
- c. Pray, pray, pray! He hears you and is near!
- d. The prayer of faith will be our final topic next week in Jm 5:13-20.