

# Showing Patience

"Faith Works" Series, August 24 & 25, 2024 | James 5:7-12

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## What do you do when trials come through people?

**We've already talked about enduring trials.**

Earlier, James told us that trials are certain in life.

He told us that we can endure trials, that we can bear up under them and remain faithful. When we do, God does big things with trials; they can make our faith complete.

**But sometimes trials come through people.**

Sometimes someone does something and we get frustrated or experience hardship as a result.

Sometimes the trial IS a person who frustrates us or harms us directly.

**One of my trials came through a physical therapist.**

I needed physical therapy for a running injury. I had to do all kinds of stretches and exercises.

My physical therapist also did dry needling on me. Dry needling is when the therapist inserts very fine needles into a muscle that is knotted up. The needles go into trigger points in the muscle which twitches but then releases and relaxes.

Is it painful? Yes. It is painful, but I can endure pain—especially when it helps me to get better.

And I could tell that my physical therapist didn't enjoy hurting me. He was helping me.

Then he went on vacation, and I had a substitute physical therapist.

She liked watching my muscles twitch and dance. She remarked, "Oh, we've got a good one!"

All of sudden, I didn't feel like I was suffering to get better. I felt like I was suffering for her enjoyment.

Suddenly, the trial changed. The pain wasn't the trial; SHE was the trial.

No longer was I simply enduring a trial. Now my trial had a face.

When a trial has a face, it calls for something other than and more than endurance.

**James tells us to be patient with people. What is patience?**

Sarah Schnitker of Baylor University has studied patience extensively.

**Patience is the ability to wait calmly in the face of frustration, adversity, or suffering.** Patience is a part of life because situations that require patience are everywhere!

**Patience comes in three varieties: interpersonal, life hardships, and daily hassles.<sup>1</sup>**

**Patience is the balancing point between recklessness and sloth.**

James told us to endure trials; now he tells us to be patient with people.

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah Schnitker, "An examination of patience and well-being," in *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, July 2012, pp. 263-280.

## **Today we will discover that faith works even when trials come through people.**

Patience is not always something we value. Sometimes we prefer to recklessly speak or act when people cause us frustration, adversity, or suffering. Other times, we prefer to retreat into complete inaction. Patience is neither. Patience is waiting calmly in the face of trials.

Patience is not easy, but patience is what God commands, and patience works.

## **Be patient with people.**

### **James tells us to be patient with people in 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.***

### **James is telling real people to be patient with real people.**

James is addressing the Christian community. He calls them, "brothers." They are real people.

He's telling them to be patient, "therefore." The word "therefore" refers to what James had just written in the preceding verses.

At the end of chapter four, James addressed those who boast arrogantly, chase after their own ends, and know the right thing to do but don't do it. They do evil instead.

Then, at the beginning of chapter five, James addresses the wealthy who get their money by abusing the poor and the powerless.

James has been looking outside the Christian community at those who harm us by their pride, selfishness, and greed. These are frequently the faces and people through whom trials come.

Therefore, James says, "Be patient." You, Christian brothers and sisters, be patient with the arrogant, selfish, greedy people who frustrate you, trouble you, and cause you to suffer.

James is getting real with real people like you and me about real people who cause us harm.

### **Is there a real person with whom you need to be patient?**

Is there a real person whose thoughtlessness has caused you frustration or harm?

Is there a real person whose arrogance and selfishness have caused you frustration or harm?

Is there a real person who just frustrates you constantly?

Or is there a real person who has caused you trouble or made you suffer?

There are real people in my life who have done that to me. I bet you know some, too.

How can we possibly be patient with these people?

### **The return of Jesus helps us to wait calmly when people frustrate us or cause us adversity.**

How can the return of Jesus help us to wait calmly when people frustrate us or hurt us now?

Jesus' return means that there will be a great reversal. One of the reasons we may want to act recklessly right now is because we want to right the wrongs that someone has done that they seem to get away with. But, when Jesus returns, he will right all wrongs. That means that those who have arrogantly gone their own way, selfishly taken all they want, and harmed the poor and powerless in the process will be judged. Apart from

Christ, they will lose everything. All will be made right. That's what happens when Jesus returns, so James says to be patient. Wait calmly. Jesus will return, and all that is wrong will be made right.

Plus, Jesus' return means that there will be a great reward. Those who have endured and obeyed him will be given eternal life and eternal blessings. So, we can be patient for now.

### **Farming illustrates what it looks like to wait calmly for Jesus.**

The farmer tills the soil, sows the seed, fertilizes, and does the weeding.

Then, the farmer must wait patiently while God works underground and overhead.

The rains come. There are the early rains in fall, early in the season. Then there are late rains in spring, late in the growing season. The farmer has to wait on those rains.

When the farmer gets the rains, he sees the sign. The sign is given. The harvest is coming.

In this metaphor, James is saying that the signs have been given that Jesus is coming again. Signs are everywhere and always pointing to the certainty of Jesus' coming again.

Like a farmer waiting for the harvest after the rain, we wait expectantly for Jesus to come again.

Because we are waiting for Jesus, we think now and behave now as we would think and behave if this were the day of Jesus' arrival.

When it comes to how we treat others and one another, that means thinking and behaving lovingly and patiently. Be patient with real people, James is saying.

### **Avoid grumbling.**

**Then, James tells us to avoid grumbling in James 5:9:**

***Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.***

### **Grumbling represents all the small clues that we are frustrated.**

The word that is used here and translated as "grumbling" is like "sighing."

It's not the temper tantrum or the diatribe that says you're totally frustrated.

Instead, it's the little sigh that says you're exasperated. It's the eye roll of judgment.

If we were in the South, we might say, "Bless your heart (space) ..."

### **I am guilty of giving off clues that I am frustrated.**

I sigh. It turns out that I sigh a lot. My wife, Tammi, will ask me, "What's that sigh for?"

To be perfectly honest, sometimes I sigh when I sit down or stand up for no apparent reason.

And sometimes I sigh when I'm lost in thought.

But frequently when I sigh, it's because I'm thinking about something that's frustrating me.

You would think then that when Tammi asks me, "What's that sign for?" I would tell her.

But no. Instead, I give the knuckle-dragging-husband response, "Nothing."

It's not a lie exactly. I prefer to think of it as a lack of self-awareness. I don't even know consciously that I am frustrated. But when I think about it, I realize that I am.

### **Do you give off clues that you're frustrated inside?**

One of my family members gets a twitch in his jawbone when he's frustrated.

Maybe you get silent.

Or cross your arms.

Perhaps your face starts to flush.

Maybe you say little things that are passive aggressive or biting.

### **Here is the tough truth James is sharing: Patience requires us to regulate our emotions.**

Small clues that we are getting frustrated may not sound like a big deal.

In fact, little things like grumbling to a friend, or sighing, or making little comments may actually feel like a release valve, letting go of pressure that is building inside or in a relationship.

However, James tells us to be careful about these little signs. Why?

Letting off a little steam actually causes the pressure to build underneath and inside.

When we show little signs of frustration and impatience, we are actually creating a feedback loop inside. If we don't regulate those feelings, we will either explode outwardly or stuff them down to poison us sometime in the future.

What we need to do is regulate our emotions and wait calmly in the face of frustration.

### **Look around!**

**Next, James tells us to look around in James 5:10-11:**

***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.***

### **Look at the prophets. They show us what patience looks like.**

The prophets in the Old Testament frequently brought news of judgment to God's people.

That was a difficult task to begin with because they were announcing judgment on their own nations, on themselves, or on their descendants. That would never be easy to do.

But announcing judgment is rarely received well. Many prophets were persecuted.

Take Jeremiah. He prophesied that a foreign army would invade, destroy the nation, and burn the capital city.

Leaders who did not want to hear his message put him into an empty cistern. He sank into the mud, and they left him there to starve alone. Thankfully, that's not where Jeremiah died.

But James tells us to look at prophets like Jeremiah who suffered yet endured. They remained faithful to God and patiently waited for God to work.

### **Look at the Savior. Jesus helps us to have patience.**

Jesus gives us another powerful example of what God expects from us. He took on human flesh and lived a human life. He was rejected by crowds, arrested by betrayers, condemned by leaders, and crucified by the Empire. The Lord of Life died on the cross. He endured suffering, patiently waiting for what God would do.

But Jesus does more than inspire. Jesus helps us.

When we become Jesus' disciples, he changes us. He makes us into new creatures. He gives us his Holy Spirit. God the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sinful ways, reminds us of Jesus' words, encourages us to obey, and breaths new life into every corner of our souls.

And Jesus is the one to whom we are accountable. As verse nine reminds us, Jesus is the Judge, and that Judge is standing at the door of our lives. He is listening to everything, and he is about to walk into our lives and give a verdict. Look at Jesus as you search for patience.

### **Look at the Gospel. The Gospel reframes everything and everyone that tests our patience.**

James reminds us that God has a purpose at work in the world. As we think about being patient with difficult people and difficult circumstances, knowing that there is a bigger purpose at work helps. Purpose gives context and meaning to our pain. And James reminds us that as we face difficult people and difficult circumstances, God has a purpose at work in our lives and in the world. That helps us to wait calmly and have patience.

Plus, James reminds us of God's identity. He reminds us of who God is. God is compassionate and merciful. That is God's name and nature. Never forget **Exodus 34:6** where God proclaimed his name to Moses:

***The LORD passed before [Moses] and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness ...***

God's name tells us his basic nature. He is compassionate and merciful, loving, and steadfast. As we calmly wait in the face of difficult people and difficult circumstances, just remembering who God is helps. God whose plan is at work is good.

But more than that, because we have God's Holy Spirit inside of us, God's image is being shaped inside of us. We ourselves are being made compassionate and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

The Gospel reframes everything and everyone that tests our patience.

### **Look at the Christians around you.**

Look at the Christians around you. I don't mean random strangers. I mean the Christians with whom you do life—those in your community group or those you have known for years.

Look at them as you seek to wait calmly in the face of difficult people and circumstances. They themselves are setting powerful examples for you.

But we look at the Christians around us not just for their example. We look at them also for their support. Just sharing life with them makes us more able to wait calmly and be patient. But their words of support and their prayers help as well.

And their feedback means something, too. A gentle word of correction can go a long way when we are losing our patience.

None of that can happen if you try to live as an island, all on your own. To grow in patience—to grow in faith in almost any way that matters—requires that we be in community with other disciples of Jesus. If you hope to grow in patience, get into community.

Look at the Christians around you.

### **Watch your language.**

**James addresses our speech AGAIN in 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.***

**He is speaking specifically about swearing oaths.**

An oath is invoking the name of deity to affirm the truthfulness of one's words.

The words could be the words of a promise made or of testimony. Invoking a deity assures that the words are true because if they are false, then the deity will punish the one making the oath.

But James is saying that for a Christian, oaths really aren't appropriate. James isn't forbidding them necessarily. He's just saying that for Christians they shouldn't be necessary.

**The simplicity and sincerity of our speech reveal our character.**

James is saying that our character should be such that when we say "yes," we mean "yes." We aren't being deceptive or passive-aggressive and really mean "no". But he also means that when we say "yes", our testimony should be true and reliable and that we will follow through and do what we say we are going to do. The same is the case when we say "no".

Our speech can be simple and sincere when we say what we mean and do what we promise.

Otherwise, it takes a lot to explain and convince and apologize.

So, our speech says a lot about our character.

**James brings this up here because our speech also reveals our patience.**

When we lose our patience, it usually comes out in our language.

Sighing turns to grumbling. Grumbling turns to angry words. Angry words turn to ugly words. Ugly words do great damage to others and to us. Patience prevents that ugly spiral.

Simplicity and sincerity in our speech reveal our patience, too.

**Think about YOUR speech. What does your speech say about your character and patience?**

Is overstatement just part of the way you talk? If so, it's hard to know what you mean.

Is exasperation something you frequently vent? If so, you may think that it's a pressure valve, but it's really a pressure cooker that is building pressure.

Is profanity part of your speech and part of the way you talk to and about others? Then you're probably saying more about who you are than you intend.

**The Bible calls us to something else, something better. Let's have patience with people.**

To do that, we have to find ourselves in the Gospel and in our good God.

We have to regulate our emotions, think about the signs we are giving off, choose our words, and choose our actions. But the Holy Spirit is shaping the image of Christ inside of us and helping us to do that very thing!

As we do learn to have patience and wait calmly in the face of difficult people and circumstances, it turns out that we tend to accomplish more and feel better about it. That's right. Research shows that patient people tend to be happier people.

Even with the difficult task of being patient with real people, faith works.